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Saint Etienne's London

The sound of sunlight

Televisual memory

Abderrahmane Sissako

Screen

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51:2 Summer 2010

issue editor

Karen Lury

ANDREW BURKE: Music, memory and modern life: Saint Etienne's London **103**

SEAN CUBITT: The sound of sunlight **118**

AMY HOLDSWORTH: Televisual memory **129**

AKIN ADESOKAN: Abderrahmane Sissako and the poetics of engaged expatriation **143**

DEBATE

ANDREW WILLIS: Cinema curation as practice and research: the *Visible Secrets* project as a model for collaboration between art cinemas and academics **161**

REVIEWS

CHRISTINE GERAGHTY: Rachel Carroll (ed.), *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture: Textual Infidelities*; Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ*; *Adaptation*, vol. 1 (2008) and vol. 2 (2009); Conference of the Association of Adaptation Studies **168**

FRANCES BONNER: Helen Wood, *Talking with Television: Women, Talk Shows and Modern Self-reflexivity* **173**

PAT KIRKHAM: Lynn Spigel, *TV By Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network Television* **176**

SARAH A. MATHESON: Darrell Varga (ed.), *Rain/Drizzle/Fog: Film and Television in Atlantic Canada* **180**

JASMINE RAULT: Lee Wallace, *Lesbianism, Cinema, Space: the Sexual Life of Apartments* **184**

STÉFANY BOISVERT AND VIVA PACI: Alison Griffiths, *Shivers Down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums and the Immersive View* **187**

KATHARINA LINDNER: Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* **190**

CONTRIBUTORS 194

NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS 196

cover illustration

Image taken from *Finisterre* (Paul Kelly and Kieran Evans, 2003). Image courtesy of Paul Kelly.

Music, memory and modern life: Saint Etienne's London

ANDREW BURKE

Blending city symphony and essay film, the cinematic collaborations of Paul Kelly, Kieran Evans and the pop group Saint Etienne constitute a lament for the disappearance of mid-century modern London. All deeply elegiac in tone, *Finisterre* (Paul Kelly and Kieran Evans, 2003), *What Have You Done Today, Mervyn Day?* (Paul Kelly, 2006) and *This is Tomorrow* (Paul Kelly, 2007) form a loose trilogy about the ways in which Thatcherite and Blairite efforts to modernize London and secure its central place in the global circulation of capital have led to the loss of the idiosyncrasies, even ideals, that characterized the modern and modernizing London of the postwar period. These films seek out the residual traces of older forms of modern life (caffs, council tower blocks, community centres), celebrating and cataloguing them in the face of their disappearance or dilapidation. As part of this melancholic work of cinematic memorialization, the films poeticize contemporary London and romanticize the city as its cherished elements decay or disappear. These films operate at the conjuncture of memory, melancholia, modernity and metropolitan life, and as such form part of a larger effort – cinematic (Patrick Keiller, Chris Petit), literary (Iain Sinclair, Shena Mackay) and artistic (Rachel Whiteread, Jeremy Deller) – to excavate a secret history of the city and assert the value of neglected spaces and disappearing forms of modern life.

To those familiar with the work of Saint Etienne, the release of *Finisterre* in 2003 as a film companion to the album of the same name gave cinematic form to several ideas and desires that have been intrinsic to the band's music since its formation in the early 1990s: the reenchantment of

Closeup from the second of the *Today's Special* series of short films, Saint Etienne's collaboration with Paul Kelly for Channel 4. Image courtesy of Paul Kelly.



everyday life, the textures of contemporary nostalgia, the utopian engagement with urban space and the fascination with the nooks and crannies of popular cultural memory. I want to point briefly to two songs from their back catalogue that bring together these conceptual preoccupations, as they anticipate both the form and the feel of the three films.

First, 'Mario's Cafe' from the band's 1993 album *So Tough* dramatizes a morning at a North London cafe and details the enthusiasm derived from the mundane and banal aspects of everyday urban life: 'Button up your sheepskin carraway, / Rainy cafe, Kentish Town, Tuesday / Barry's looking through the *Racing Post*, / Orders coffee, another round of toast.' Mario's Cafe is, at once, a real place, part of the mid-century London cafe culture that is rapidly disappearing with the proliferation of chain outlets, but also an imagined space, a fantasized location of community and continuity and a possible alternative to the social and economic turn inaugurated by Thatcher and expanded under New Labour. Indeed, 'Mario's Cafe very much anticipated the more recent embrace of 'the caff' as a privileged site of nostalgic longing for the feeling of the modern, exemplified by Adrian Maddox's ongoing *Classic Cafes* project but also the subject of innumerable websites celebrating and anatomizing the fry-up and full English.¹ The band themselves, in collaboration with Kelly, have produced a series of short films for Channel 4, the *Today's Special* series, that document the dying days of three modern London cafes, including the famed, and now closed, New Piccadilly. Each three-minute film savours the particularities of these residual spaces. Establishing shots situate the caffs in their changing, even gentrifying, neighbourhoods, while closeups capture the aging and worn crockery, countertops and cappuccino

1 The *Classic Cafes* website (<http://www.classiccafes.co.uk/>), though now only infrequently updated, remains a valuable resource for the history of the caff in the UK, including a comprehensive list of films, novels and television programmes that document or draw on caff culture. There are a number of breakfast blogs, but *The London Review of Breakfasts* <<http://londonreviewofbreakfasts.blogspot.com/>> and *eggsbaconchipsandbeans* <<http://russelldavies.typepad.com/eggsbaconchipsandbeans/>>, like 'Mario's Cafe', privilege the shabby and share an enthusiasm for formica and the unfussy [both accessed 25 March 2010].

machines. Static framings aestheticize these remnants of the past, and tight closeups of the fixtures and fittings emphasize the history of their use. The visual tempo of the films, consisting primarily of a series of static shots three or four seconds each in length, complements the voiceover reminiscences of the proprietors and patrons that, along with a midtempo and melancholic piano score, serves as their soundtrack. These shorts, like the song 'Mario's Cafe' itself, are suffused with melancholy but driven by desire: the desire both to document these places and the forms of community they support before they disappear, and also to capture something of the magic of the city, to share the thrill of discovering out-of-the-way places that are at once exemplary of the urban experience yet disappearing from its very fabric.

Such nostalgia may seem immobilizing or necrotizing, the preserve of the Right and a threat to the Left, but as I will claim in relation to the full-length films as well, this regard of the past need not be understood as necessarily retrogressive. As Stuart Tannock has argued: 'We need to separate out, in the critique of nostalgia, the critique of the content, author, and audience of a nostalgic narrative – who is nostalgic for what, and in the names of which community – from the critique of the structure of nostalgia itself – the positive evaluation of the past in response to a negatively evaluated present'.² What is symbolized by 'Mario's Cafe' in particular, both place and song, is the significance of shabby residuality, the way in which the traces of the past bear within them not just the outlines of unactualized futures, but also the more general sense that things could, might, or even can, be otherwise. As such, nostalgia need not be understood merely as the desire to retreat into the past, but rather as a manifestation of utopian longing politically necessary in an era when substantive political change seems more or less impossible.³ It can be understood as both symptom and strategy: a common affliction of a particular historical moment and a means by which one can grasp the sense that another world is possible.

Tannock's 'Nostalgia critique' is perhaps the landmark essay in the recent theoretical rehabilitation of nostalgia, but such efforts have a longer history, one which certainly can be traced back to Walter Benjamin, whose analytical eye was so frequently drawn towards the dilapidated and threadbare. Benjamin was well aware of the volatility of nostalgia, the ever-present potential for the work of memory to lapse into mere sentimental reminiscence. Furthermore, for Benjamin, such a lapse was not solely a tendency of the right. Indeed, in 'Left-wing melancholy', he condemns those on the Left who take refuge in the past in order to avoid political action in the present.⁴ Despite this, throughout his work Benjamin refuses to dismiss nostalgia outright or to concede it to the reactionary or retrogressive elements on either side of the political spectrum. As a result, Benjamin has come to exemplify the way in which nostalgia might be understood as an integral part of the work of cultural memory and even a potential catalyst for positive political change. In

2 Stuart Tannock, 'Nostalgia critique', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3 (1995), p. 456.

3 The common formulation of this idea derives from Slavoj Žižek. See 'The spectre of ideology', in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 1. The recent global economic tremor has made our collective incapacity to imagine a substantively different future all the more apparent, with even the boldest of political programmes being little more than calls for structural adjustment. In such a scenario, nostalgia can be understood as serving the minimum purpose of sustaining hope and desire.

4 Walter Benjamin, 'Left-wing melancholy', in Michael Jennings et al. (eds), *Selected Writings*, Volume II, Part II, 1931–34 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 423–37.

Marxism and Form, for instance, Fredric Jameson invokes Benjamin as the figure whose monumental effort to work through the detritus of the past mitigates against any hasty rejection of nostalgia as necessarily enervating or depleting:

But if nostalgia as a political motivation is most frequently associated with Fascism, there is no reason why a nostalgia conscious of itself, a lucid and remorseless dissatisfaction with the present on the grounds of some remembered plenitude cannot furnish as adequate a revolutionary stimulus as any other: the example of Benjamin is there to prove it.⁵

5 Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 82.

That places might trigger this ‘remembered plenitude’ is demonstrated throughout Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, which seizes on the residual spaces of nineteenth-century Paris not simply in order to indulge in sentimental recollection or idealization but as a way to preserve and sustain the revolutionary energies of the past, even if these are failed or flawed. While it is perhaps a stretch to claim that the memories of a lazy weekday morning at a shabby North London caff are likewise meant to serve as a stimulus to revolution, I would claim that ‘Mario’s Cafe’ does share something of the Benjaminian impulse to sustain the sense that other forms of life are possible, and that the residual traces of the past are a crucially important archive of dreams, desires and political demands that otherwise would be lost to the present.

With this idea that nostalgia can serve as a vehicle for holding open a space in the political imaginary, I want to consider a second track by Saint Etienne which points to the formal mechanisms and constructions that underpin their work and allows for this potentially politically progressive form of nostalgic remembrance. In its very title, ‘How We Used to Live’ signals an interest in the past and its representation. It alludes to the long-running historical television drama made by ITV Schools that aired between 1968 and the late 1980s, but also suggests that the substance of history rests in everyday life itself, the practices through which our lives unfold, and the places in which this happens. The song is a triptych, with each section drawing on and reworking familiar generic elements, ranging from the observational and reflective aspects of 1960s British pop to the sequenced rhythms and arpeggios of 1980s Euro dancefloor to the melancholy choruses of jazz-inflected 1970s folk rock. As such, it exemplifies what Simon Reynolds has identified as the governing Saint Etienne aesthetic: ‘constructing your own alternative pop universe, hallucinating the hybrid styles that should have but never did happen’.⁶ In the way that it collates and combines an array of styles and forms, preserving them even as it submits them to all kinds of mutations and modifications, the track demonstrates that the work of Saint Etienne is driven by archival and curatorial impulses as well as creative ones. To borrow a concept from Will Straw, the song is perhaps best understood as a ‘container for cultural knowledges ... a storage device, through which a set of historical references are held, delivered to

6 The quote is from Simon Reynolds’s review of the debut Saint Etienne album, *Foxbase Alpha*, in *Melody Maker*, 5 October 1991, <http://reynoldsretro.blogspot.com/2007_10_01_archive.html> [accessed 25 March 2010].

7 Will Straw, 'Embedded memories', in Charles Acland (ed.), *Residual Media* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p.10.

8 Of the members of the band, Bob Stanley is the most actively engaged in a wide array of cultural activity. He regularly writes on music, architecture, films and the arts for *The Guardian* and *The Times*; he has curated a number of film seasons at the Barbican, including ones on lost pop films, football documentaries and short films about London; and he has compiled and written liner notes for a wide variety of musical reissues.

9 Charlotte Brunsdon, *London in Cinema: the Cinematic City Since 1945* (London: British Film Institute, 2007), pp. 22–23.

various places, and allowed to occupy cultural space'.⁷ The individual track or album is not the only vehicle Saint Etienne use for this process of retrieval, reworking and rediffusion. Indeed, this kind of containerization is observable in a whole set of cultural activities associated with the band. Most obviously, their work as DJs typifies this kind of memory practice, but their efforts as compilationists, film programmers, writers, artists-in-residence and curators/organizers need also to be understood as interventions into popular cultural memory.⁸ I am not sure that there is an itemizable list of criteria that would distinguish songs such as 'How We Used to Live' from pastiche or the easy semiotic dexterity observable everywhere nowadays that allows for the mixing and matching of historical styles and signs in a manner, as Jameson has often noted, which evokes the past without really registering its import or significance. Nevertheless, I am tempted to suggest that at minimum such works and practices must defamiliarize the past as much as refamiliarize it, generating uncanny constellations and unearthing secret histories rather than being a mere catalyst for sentimental reminiscence. 'How We Used to Live' does this, and thus serves as a kind of model for the curatorial creativity that also characterizes the film work of the band.

The film of *Finisterre* takes as its explicit aim this kind of defamiliarization. In style and tempo the film draws much from Patrick Keiller's *London* and similarly comprises a series of images shot from a static camera. The movement of the film, as a result, resides in the frame itself as well as in the montage. In certain sequences, images of the city, its architecture and its infrastructure predominate, as the film tries to capture the dynamics of urban life itself through its built forms and landscape, while in others the focus is more on the idiosyncratic details of the everyday, from torn flyposters and graffiti to the queues and conversations outside bars and nightclubs, that represent the sociability of city living. The bulk of the film blends these two perspectives, mixing the panoramic with the particular in an effort to generate a sense of the whole from a sequence of its parts. Shot in vivid colour, frequently muted by the haze of the city, the film's montage works on the logic of association and juxtaposition, eschewing dissolves as part of its effort to show the simultaneity of a totality: of all this happening now. As much as the film perhaps inevitably shows some aspects of London familiar even to those who have never visited the city, it frames them in such a way that does not simply repeat the touristic gaze or lazily reproduce the location montage that Charlotte Brunsdon identifies as a standard feature of so many films set in the capital, what she calls 'the shorthand iconography of location . . . that river, that clock, that bridge, those buses, those taxis'.⁹ *Finisterre* for the most part seeks out the unfamiliar and overlooked, and it explicitly borrows this objective from Geoffrey Fletcher's *The London Nobody Knows*, a guidebook first published in 1962 that sought to record the disappearing features of Victorian London: the public lavatories, the

10 Geoffrey Fletcher, *The London Nobody Knows* (London: Penguin, 1965), p. 10.

Yiddish theatres and the lamplighters, among other things, people and practices. In one of the opening sequences of *Finisterre*, the narrator (Michael Jayston) cites Fletcher in order to signal this sense of affiliation and common purpose: 'My object is to encourage an appreciation of those unlooked-for pleasures . . . to create an enthusiasm for the neglected or undervalued, the freakish, even'.¹⁰ Of course there is a historical shift that is in play here. Fletcher's eye is drawn primarily to nineteenth-century London, the Dickensian elements, the music-halls, ironwork and railway stations. *Finisterre*, in contrast, dwells upon precisely those modernist structures that were replacing the London Fletcher loves, many of which are now, in turn, in an advanced state of decay or being demolished after a life-cycle of only forty or fifty years.

The opening of the film version of *The London Nobody Knows* (Norman Cohen, 1967) turns this process of dilapidation, demolition and renewal into slapstick, complete with speeded-up images and jaunty music. Punctuated by the whistle of the construction foreman and the crash of cymbals, Cohen emphasizes the sheer pace of London's transformation in the 1960s. What in one shot is a building site is in the next a completed modernist tower. A montage of recently finished office blocks culminates in a series of shots of the Post Office Tower, singling it out as the most modernist and monstrous of the developments that symbolized Prime Minister Harold Wilson's promise to modernize the nation in the 'white heat of technological revolution'. This opening sequence emphasizes the alienness of these new blocks and towers but also registers, in the image of a swinging wrecking ball, the vanishing of an earlier London, both in terms of the destruction of older buildings to make room for new ones and the disappearance of the practices and activities associated with these spaces. James Mason serves as the film's melancholic guide and manifests a world-weariness that simmers with resentment. Mason's onscreen presence makes *The London Nobody Knows* as much travelogue as tirade, and far more than *Finisterre* the film is constructed as a historical tour of urban curiosities and forgotten places. Freed from following an onscreen guide, *Finisterre* is far more fluid, using montage to drift throughout the city and to show its contemporary transformation. Commenting on the rapid changes that are transforming the London he knows and desires, Mason notes: 'there's no need to be too sad about it because, after all, most of Victorian London was fairly hideous. And we can also console ourselves with the knowledge that the same fate attends our least favourite modern monstrosities.' Throughout *Finisterre*, the current pace of London's transformation is signaled by the omnipresence of cranes in the capital, dotting the skyline and serving as an indication that the contemporary transformation of London is as dramatic as that of the 1960s. *Finisterre* does not echo the same resentment towards these new residential and corporate developments that *The London Nobody Knows* bears towards its modernist blocks, yet it shares the sense that loss is felt and registered before it truly happens. Thus *Finisterre*, like *The London Nobody Knows*,

11 *Tales from Turnpike House*, the follow-up album to *Finisterre*, continued this investigation into the dynamics of modernist living in contemporary times. The album, released in 2005, is an old-fashioned concept album, with each track documenting a different aspect of life in the eponymous, fictional block of flats.

documents a city in the process of disappearing rather than lamenting one that is already gone.

Finisterre does not simply rhapsodize Centre Point, the Post Office Tower or the other icons of London modernism that take their place in Cohen's montage. Its modernist touchstones are a bit more esoteric: the Barbican is featured, but so are the Isokon building and Highpoint, two experiments in modernist apartment blocks from the 1930s, as well as several council estates. The focus on modernism's machines for living, domestic spaces within the hustle and bustle of contemporary London, indicates an interest in how the spaces of modernism continue to be used, whatever their state of preservation or dilapidation.¹¹ *Finisterre* dramatizes the variance in the maintenance of modernism, juxtaposing a sequence that illustrates the general disrepair of an Islington council estate (to the sounds of 'The Way We Live Now') with shots of the well-preserved Barbican. Such a contrast suggests that there is nothing intrinsic to architectural modernism, or to brutalism in particular, that lends itself to decay and degeneration, but rather that the state of these spaces has everything to do with varying levels of neglect and social and economic exclusion.

As much as the film savours images of the Barbican, with the shot of two hot-air balloons floating past Shakespeare Tower being perhaps its most striking image, the series of shots that show kids from the rundown estate posed against the dirty, textured concrete of the buildings expresses both the betrayal of those who live in such ill-maintained surroundings and a more general betrayal of the hopes and desires that came with the construction of these buildings in the first place. The Barbican stands as the exception, fulfilling as it does some of the desires of modernity that catalyzed its construction. Yet the film does not succumb to the desire for a wholesale return to, or complete fetishistic preservation of, the past, nor for a wholesale reanimation of its political dreams. Rather, it glimpses in the residual traces of that past, whether they are in a state of disintegration or gentrification, some sense of an alternative, unrealized or even unrealizable future. *Finisterre* expresses this in a line borrowed from the Buzzcocks' 'Nostalgia' – 'I feel a nostalgia for an age yet to come' – that mixes temporalities and suggests that memory is not simply about the past, but about the future that the past might yet yield by awakening the present to what is possible. In this way, *Finisterre* shares with a number of other works a specific relationship with a modernist past and its architectural remainders. Like, for instance, *Our Friends in the North* (BBC, 1996) or *Red Road* (Andrea Arnold, 2006), *Finisterre* does not simply condemn the tower block or council estate as a failure of modernization or symbol of modernist hubris. Even as the failures and shortcomings of these sorts of developments are tallied and catalogued, the film nevertheless registers the aspirations that lie behind them and which should not be abandoned as a consequence of their neglect. In tone, this sequence of the film is also reminiscent of the work of Rachel Whiteread, particularly her series of

12 Rachel Whiteread's *Demolished* series has been overshadowed by her Turner Prize-winning *House* (1993), a concrete cast of the inside of a Victorian terraced house in Hackney. That work shares with *Demolished* the effort to capture a space, place and way of life at the moment of its disappearance. For more on *House*, see the archive of the project at the Artangel website <http://www.artangel.org.uk/projects/1993/house> [accessed 25 March 2010], as well as Iain Sinclair, 'House in the park', in *Lights out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the History of London* (London: Granta, 1997), pp. 211–41.

13 Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 126.

photographs, *Demolished* (1993–95), which documents the demolition of a series of tower blocks on three different housing estates in Hackney, East London. Shot from afar, the blocks seem menacing and inhuman in scale. Nevertheless, the concluding image in the sequence, a closer shot of the mound of rubble that remained after the demolition took place, somehow changes the force and significance of the ones that precede it, transforming the image of the tower blocks from a symbol of the failures of the welfare state and the arrogance of modern architecture and planning into a signifier of society's failure to fulfil modernity's promises. *Finisterre* focuses on dilapidation rather than demolition, yet what it shares with Whiteread's work is the desire to document these spaces before, or even as, they disappear, and to register the lives that were or are still lived within them.¹²

Finisterre is a hybrid generic construction. It does not feature any characters as such, but rather, as Bob Stanley of Saint Etienne himself explains in an essay that accompanies the DVD, takes the shape of an 'imaginary 24 hours in London, starting in the suburbs at dawn, then following a mental map of the city until we ended up heading home at six the following morning'. This makes it to a certain degree autobiographical, since Stanley and bandmate Pete Wiggs were suburban kids themselves, but it also captures something of the general enthusiasm for the city experienced by those who grow up on its peripheries and for whom a trip into the city means the thrill of discovery and possible (mis)adventure. The tracking shot that opens the film and takes the viewer from the platform at Croydon station through the suburban fringes, across the river and into Victoria station is deeply reminiscent of the journeys Hanif Kureishi represents throughout his work. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, his protagonist Karim Amir describes his excitement in the city, having escaped suburban Bromley:

The city blew the windows of my brain wide open. But being in a place so bright, fast and brilliant made you vertiginous with possibility: it didn't necessarily help you to grasp those possibilities. I still had no idea what I was going to do. I felt directionless and lost in the crowd. I couldn't yet see how the city worked, but I began to find out.¹³

Finisterre evokes a similar feeling in its title track, with Sarah Cracknell announcing 'I love the lack of logic / I love the feeling of being slightly lost'. Even to those who know the city well, it offers surprises with the opportunity to lose one's way, to feel slightly lost in a manner that pleasurably unsettles one's sense of self. If Kureishi conveys the excitement of the young suburbanite gaining access to the thrills of the metropolis detailed in the film's once-around-the-clock structure, then it is a raft other writers, most notably Iain Sinclair, on whom the film implicitly draws to communicate the ongoing exhilaration of the depths of London: its secret histories, its odd corners, and its obscure landmarks. Although the film never indulges in the sort of psychogeographic drift and fascination with the occult that is Sinclair's stock-in-trade, it does

share with his work the sense that the space of the city is home to the traces of the past, not in the form of the monumental or museal, but rather of the seemingly minor or marginal.

One of the most distinctive features of *Finisterre* is its voiceover narration, which sets out the general themes of the piece through a series of cryptic and sometimes surreal comments. These are done by Michael Jayston, an actor who has lent his voice over the years to any number of adverts and station identifications, including those for Capital Radio and BBC Essex. This conjunction of narration and montage links the film most obviously to Patrick Keiller's *London* (1993), narrated by Paul Scofield. Jayston's comments punctuate rather than narrate the film, but more importantly the choice of Jayston, an actor whose voice is perhaps more familiar than iconic, fits with the way in which the film aligns memory and music. The sound of his voice, recognizable but not instantly identifiable, potentially takes the viewer, as Jayston himself intones in introducing the song 'Amateur', 'back, back, further back' into the recesses of popular cultural and individual memory. The idea here is that incidental details of the past reside as tenaciously in one's mind as primary ones. In terms of media, the fascination with continuity announcements, station identifications, public information films, schools programming, the shipping forecast (from which *Finisterre* takes its name) and other ephemeral bits and pieces of the recent past suggests that it is the mundane as much as the monumental that can seize hold of memory and elicit a kind of melancholic reaction seemingly out of proportion to the ordinariness of the trigger itself. The past haunts the present in this incidental way, its residual energies taking solidly material form in the city, its architecture, and its streets, but also taking a somewhat more immaterial form in the echoes and ghostly images that return from the past.

'Hauntology', drawn from Jacques Derrida, has emerged as the generic and critical classification for a recent wave of music (most notably a clutch of artists on the Ghost Box label, including the Focus Group, the Advisory Circle and Belbury Poly) that, as Simon Reynolds explains, draws on

the spirit of technocratic utopianism that flourished in post-war Britain, from the misunderstood Brutalist school in architecture (they meant well, they really did) to the democratisation of learning undertaken by the Open University and further manifested by the 1960s paperback explosion, as pioneered by Penguin with its blue-spined drive to educate the common man. Running in opposition to Ghost Box's penchant for all things atavistic and heathen is their 'nostalgia for the future' (to quote David Toop, on Black Dog, in these very pages), a wistful harking back to the optimistic, forward-looking, benignly bureaucratic Britain of new towns and garden cities, comprehensives and polytechnics.¹⁴

¹⁴ Simon Reynolds, 'Society of the spectral', *The Wire*, no. 273 (2006), p. 29.

15 The development of and debate about 'hauntology' in relation to contemporary music has, for the most part, happened online, but for an overview of the hauntological as a generic category, as well as some consideration of its theoretical origins, see Reynolds, 'Society of the spectral', pp. 26–33. The 'hauntological' has also been increasingly central in understanding a certain strain of literature relating to contemporary London, including the work of Iain Sinclair. For more, see Roger Luckhurst, 'The contemporary London Gothic and the limits of the "spectral turn"', *Textual Practice*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2002), pp. 527–46.

Although Saint Etienne only rarely manifest the uncanny creepiness of the Ghost Box artists, their work, nevertheless, has long anticipated this more recent spectral return of the 1960s and 1970s, from the folktronic hybrids of their 1994 album *Tiger Bay* to the samples of public information films, snippets of daytime television, and dialogue from British New Wave films scattered throughout their early work.¹⁵ But in addition to the ghostly presence of the sounds of the past in their recorded work, the visual identity of Saint Etienne is also haunted by the past, not simply in terms of the striped shirts and bowl-cuts of Bob Stanley and Pete Wiggs (as well as the jumble-sale glamour of Sarah Cracknell, the singer), but in terms of the graphic design of their albums and promotional material, which frequently collates and archives dated images and outmoded design styles from the recent past in a fashion that corresponds precisely to the sonic bricolage of their music. These mnemonic triggers find cinematic form in *Finisterre* in the way that the camera finds, and focuses on, the in-between and nondescript spaces of the city. As much as it visits specific places associated with the secret history of London it wants to uncover, it also lingers in spots without narrative reason or specific cultural or subcultural significance. These spots, streetscapes and perspectives are, like the sonic bits of the cultural past that punctuate individual tracks, incidental details, filler within the fabric of the city that is the stuff of a different kind of memory, one that is more than capable of reconstituting in a flash an entire, vanished structure of feeling.

As I have already suggested, Keiller's *London* serves as precedent and model for the type of film that *Finisterre* aspires to be. Yet as much as *Finisterre* shares with Keiller's film the desire to explore memory through place, and to glimpse the outlines of a future in the residual and the outmoded, there are important formal differences between the two films. First, in addition to the voiceover narration and in contrast with *London*, *Finisterre* includes interviews with several people, each of whom meditate on their personal connection to London or their experience of living in the capital. The film does not show these interviewees directly, but rather allows their voices to shape and colour individual montage sequences. The selection of interviewees, people such as Vashti Bunyan, Mark Perry and Lawrence from Felt, generates a kind of secret history of pop and London, but also forges links with kindred spirits working in other forms, from the artist Julian Opie to the novelist Shena Mackay.

Secondly, *Finisterre*, perhaps predictably, features far more music than Keiller's film. This links the film to the pop promo video, and sections of *Finisterre* very much have the feel and texture of the more aestheticized variants of that form, not simply in the way it uses rapid editing to complement the rhythms of the more upbeat songs on the album, but also because it frequently presents series of images in a manner that is as much associative and lyrical as it is sequential and narrative. One of the most visually striking sequences of the film shows

Londoners navigating the city through the torrents of rain from a summer shower. Set to the song ‘Shower Scene’ with its refrain of ‘in the rain’, the sequence fits with the overall effort of the film to represent city life from dawn to dusk to dawn again, but it is striking specifically because of its conjunction of sound and image, the way in which the shots of umbrellas, puddles and even a rainbow combine with the music to create more than the sum of their all-too-clichéd parts. The musicality of these montage sequences embedded in the hour-long duration of the film and its efforts to represent a variety of aspects of urban life, as well as its day-in-the-life-of-London structure, also connect it to the genre of city film or city symphony, the most notable examples of which date from the 1920s: Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927). But whatever the strength of these generic affiliations to the music video and city symphony, I nevertheless also think of *Finisterre* in terms of the essay film. This is not to suggest that it has a concrete argument or thesis – essay films rarely do, especially if we take someone like Chris Marker as exemplifying the genre – but rather that its primary task is rumination and reflection, the effort to come to grips with its subject matter itself.¹⁶ *Finisterre* grapples with the idea and feel of London, and tries to express the sheer experience and exhilaration of it, but more importantly contemplates the connection between metropolis and memory, the ways in which memory is imprinted on the spaces of the city and how, in turn, those spaces constitute an archive of, and trigger for, recollection and revitalization both on an individual level and a collective one. This self-reflexive effort to think about the way in which personal memory can also be public is the substance of *Finisterre* as a cinematic essay, but also connects to the film’s other central idea: how one can be nostalgic both for an age yet to come and for an age that one did not directly experience. These memories are, to invoke Alison Landsberg’s evocative phrase, ‘prosthetic’, in the sense that they are appended to the body of one’s own memory from outside yet nevertheless become integral to it.¹⁷ Music has an important part to play in this, not simply in providing the minor-key wistfulness that conventionally represents thinking, contemplation, and reflection, but in being another form in which thought can happen, cultural and historical connections can be drawn, and the energies of times past can be preserved, sustained and made one’s own.

Yet as much as I want to avoid the standard cliché that film music expresses emotion, that its function is commonly melodramatic, there is little use in denying that it frequently serves this purpose in *Finisterre* and in the Saint Etienne films that have followed. In order to think further about the connections between memory, music and emotion, I want to move on to the second of the three films. *What Have You Done Today, Mervyn Day?*, which appeared two years after *Finisterre*, is suffused with melancholia and menace due in large part to its soundtrack.¹⁸ The film documents the industrial wastes and the pastoral enclaves of East

¹⁶ For more on the essay film and the importance of Chris Marker in development of the genre, see Nora Alter, *Chris Marker* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006) pp. 16–20, and Laura Rascaroli, ‘The essay film: problems, definitions, textual commitments’, *Framework*, vol. 49, no. 2 (2008), pp. 24–47.

¹⁷ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: the Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 2–3.

¹⁸ The title of the film refers to the 1970s West Ham United goalkeeper. Football plays a significant part in the work of Saint Etienne and their collaborators. Bob Stanley and Paul Kelly have published *Match Day: Football Programmes Postwar to Premiership* (London: Fuel, 2006), a collection that exemplifies similar archival, curatorial and nostalgic impulses as their film work, and the name of the band itself alludes to AS Saint-Etienne, a team that dominated French football throughout the 1970s.

London's Lea Valley on the eve of its redevelopment for the 2012 Olympics. There is a connection here with *The Long Good Friday* (John Mackenzie, 1979), which documents the transformation of the Docklands through a fictional frame. In this film, East End gangster Harold Shand (Bob Hoskins) buys up former docks and warehouses in anticipation of London hosting the 1988 Olympics. Harold does not survive to make his killing, nor does London get the Olympics, but the film does capture the area in the moment just before its transformation into Canary Wharf and the influx of multinational capital. Moreover, despite Shand's entrepreneurial ambitions and ruthlessness, he does sincerely lament the closing down of the docks and the loss of the entire way of life they represent. The film is deeply elegiac, even in those moments when Shand adopts the crass bluster of the developer and announces that it all must be swept away in the name of progress. He is, as he himself says, 'a businessman with a sense of history', and he cannot help but gaze regretfully over that which he wants to destroy and remember: 'Used to be the greatest docks in the world at one time, this'. *What Have You Done Today, Mervyn Day?* likewise lapses into elegy but does not dwell there, managing not to fetishize the industrial ruins that are the object of its cinematic fascination. As Bob Stanley writes in the notes to the film:

The Olympic Village will wipe out almost all of this, and it is a good thing too. The pylons will all be buried underground, the Northern Outfall Sewer will become a majestic grassy thoroughfare, the dilapidated Eastway cycle track will be replaced by a new Velodrome, the waterways will all be cleaned up. But lovers of urban decay and fabulous dereliction are urged to go there sharpish. It's your last chance to take a field trip to the birthplace of the twentieth century in all its beautiful, chaotic squalor.

Stanley laments the banal residential developments that will displace the array of artists, artisans, light industry and residual services that currently occupy the polluted ground of the Lea Valley, yet understands that such a displacement is, depressingly enough, the only way in which the area will be cleaned up.¹⁹

As much as Mackenzie's thriller provides a historical antecedent for the melancholy that haunts modern fantasies of East End renewal, perhaps the more germane connection here is with children's film and television from the late 1960s and 1970s. This is due in part to the film's narrative structure. The film follows a fictional paperboy as he journeys through the spaces of the Lea Valley on his bicycle. But it is also due to the use of music, ambient sound and silence to generate a sense of loneliness, desolation and danger. Dissonant electronic noises are reminiscent of the more alarming varieties of Public Information Films (the ones that warn children not to fall into ponds or play nearby electric substations) and of the output of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, whose eerie soundtracks for children's adventure and mystery programmes

¹⁹ For a more critical account of the effect Olympic redevelopment is having on the East End, see Iain Sinclair, 'The scam of scams', *London Review of Books*, vol. 30, no. 12 (2008), pp. 17–25. Sinclair expands upon his reservations about East End regeneration schemes in *Hackney, that Rose-Red Empire: a Confidential Report* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2009).

20 The most notorious of these films, *Apaches* (1977), was sponsored by the Central Office of Information and the Health and Safety Executive and directed by John Mackenzie just two years before he directed *The Long Good Friday*. The film warns of the dangers to children on farms, following six schoolchildren as they all, one by one, die as a result of careless play. Other Public Information Films, such as those in the *Play Safe* series, feature the combination of electronic noises and traditional orchestration that is reproduced and revisited in the work of Saint Etienne, the Focus Group, Belbury Poly and the Advisory Circle.

sometimes seem to have traumatized an entire generation of British youth.²⁰ As much as the soundtrack's bleeps and blips evoke the industrial heritage of the Lea Valley, its historical significance as the place where both plastic and petroleum were first engineered, these retro-electric sounds are juxtaposed with a pastoral lyricism that, as Sukhdev Sandhu suggests, connects *Mervyn Day* to that quintessential melancholic children's film *Kes* (Ken Loach, 1969). This array of sonic affiliations does more than consolidate a generic kinship; it establishes the links between music, memory and postwar modernity.

Even if *Mervyn Day* is about the contemporary transformation of the Lea Valley, its residual state in 2002 as an industrial and pastoral anachronism within the space of the city itself, its structure and feel hark back to an earlier historical moment before the conversion of kids into (to borrow a phrase from *Finisterre*) the 'hoods up, heads down' menaces of today; to a time when they were adventurers whose play and exploration could transform the derelict into the dreamlike. This transformation is perhaps most associated with films produced in the wake of World War II, such as *Hue and Cry* (Charles Crichton, 1946), which registers the destruction of the war in situating its action in and around the bombed-out East End yet uses the spirit of its young characters to represent the possibility of, even need for, reconstruction and renewal of both neighbourhood and nation. But the youthful, imaginative transformation of space is not restricted to that immediate postwar moment. Indeed, urban renewal itself and its subsequent dilapidation likewise generate spaces subject to play and possibility. In *Ratcatcher* (Lynne Ramsay, 1999), the young protagonist haunts the disused canal near the decaying tenements in which he lives. It is a place of escape for him from the claustrophobia of a crowded flat, but also a space of deep menace, contrasted with a new housing development still under construction on the outskirts of Glasgow that he visits, first in fact then in fantasy. Although the tone and ambience of Ramsay's canalside sequences differ greatly from the high-spirited adventures of the kids in *Hue and Cry*, what they share is a sense that the terrain of the city connects the psychic and physical. The young characters are certainly shaped by their environment, but their desires also shape it. The photographic stillness of Ramsay's representation of 1973 Glasgow suffering through a garbage strike expresses a desire to remember the precise feel of that moment and its social and political transformations, while her use of a young protagonist emphasizes the sense of loss and the irrevocability of the changes. In its static framings and its aestheticization of the abandoned and overgrown, *Mervyn Day* is likewise suffused with an oneiric quality that makes it more than a simple documentation of decay. Both films look to that which has been left behind in an effort to register the ambitions of the past, the disappointments of the present, and a muted and modest hope for the future. Again, this retrospective gaze is less a matter of a conservative

Turning the derelict into the dreamlike, in *What Have You Done Today, Mervyn Day?* (Paul Kelly, 2006). Image courtesy of Paul Kelly.



desire for the past than an effort to grip the past, and its structure of feeling, in the moment before it disappears.

I want to conclude with just a few comments on the latest in the series of Saint Etienne films about London, *This is Tomorrow* (2007). It is the most conventional documentary of the three and takes as its subject the history and recent renovation of the Royal Festival Hall. Drawing on archival footage of its construction for the Festival of Britain in 1951, using interviews with those involved in its design and construction, and documenting the process of its restoration, *This is Tomorrow* is a straightforward celebration of the building and the spirit of postwar modernization that it represents. It is not without melancholy in that the renovation of the Royal Festival Hall is understood as an exception to the wider neglect of a postwar architectural heritage and the dissipation of the civic and social determination that saw it built in the first place. But the title itself points to the conceptual frame of the project. The phrase *This is Tomorrow*, with its sense of futurity and aspiration, fits very much with the spirit of the Festival of Britain, yet it refers specifically to a 1956 exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery that brought together artists and architects including visual artist Richard Hamilton, sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi, photographer Nigel Henderson, and architects Erno Goldfinger and Alison and Peter Smithson.²¹

The *This is Tomorrow* exhibition is an important touchstone in the sense that it marks the emergence of modern pop art in Britain. Participants were organized into groups, and each group produced work that drew on each member's expertise to produce some vision or representation of how the future is latent in the present. As Laurence Alloway writes in the introduction to the exhibition catalogue, *This is Tomorrow* does not propose 'a programme for the future' and recognizes that 'yesterday's future is not today's', but rather, as

21 For more on how the 1951 Festival of Britain sought to represent a modernist futurity, see Becky E. Conekin, *'The Autobiography of a Nation': The 1951 Festival of Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), particular her chapter on 'The Festival's representations of the future', pp. 46–79.

22 *This is Tomorrow*, Exhibition Catalogue (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956). Available at <http://www.thisistomorrow2.com/images/cat_1956/cat_web/FrameSet.htm> [accessed 25 March 2010]. Substantial portions of the catalogue are reproduced in David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 150–59.

Richard Hamilton's group puts it, 'Tomorrow is shut up in today and yesterday. . . . Tomorrow is released when instants past contact this instant here, now.'²² This, I would argue, is a suitable summation of the musical and cinematic practice of Saint Etienne and their collaborators. The material residue of the past, however forlorn or failed, is integral to any imagining of the future. Furthermore, music is not just the soundtrack to this effort, but is a component part of it.

The sound of sunlight

SEAN CUBITT

In films as disparate as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Greenaway, 1975) and *Sunshine* (Danny Boyle, 2007), sunlight is given an aural presence of considerable distinction. Perhaps only the tradition of the nocturne – ‘a dreamy musical piece’, as the *OED* has it – has acquired such a recognizable audio palette. This essay began as an investigation into an oddity in film sound: the sonification of an essentially silent phenomenon. It has become instead a little journey into the curious relations between sound, subjects and an environment hostile to both, the desert, as it has been represented in three films – *The Garden of Allah* (Richard Boleslawski, 1936), *Lawrence of Arabia* (David Lean, 1962) and *Kingdom of Heaven* (Ridley Scott, 2005) – over a seventy-year period.

Sunlight proved a particularly daunting subject for optical science. As Jonathan Crary observes in the closing pages of *Techniques of the Observer*, Turner’s immersion in sunlight in his canvases of the 1840s contrasts dramatically with its exclusion in the camerae obscurae of Kepler, Newton and Descartes.¹ A roster of optical investigators in the early nineteenth century damaged their eyesight permanently through a variety of extreme experiments, including at least one case of gazing into the sun for so long that the result was incurable blindness. Source of light though it is, the sun itself cannot be seen, cannot be looked at, without loss of sight. Even a brief glimpse produces an image not of the sun but of its retinal afterimage, as the overloaded rods in the retina shut down and allow the cones to take over, giving the effect of the colour draining out of vision.

This is a fundamental problem not only for eyes but for cameras. The old videocon tube cameras, like eyes, burnt out and went permanently ‘blind’ if turned to the sun. Chip cameras attempt to autocorrect their

¹ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: on Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1990).

- 2 The poet Goethe (1749–1832) engaged in a polemic against Newton’s analytical optics in his *Theory of Colours* (1810), a work which, in line with the Romantic movement, stressed the subjective nature of perception, arguing that such phenomena as afterimages demonstrated that the eye was a source as well as a receiver of light. The celebrated scientist Jan Evangelista Purkinje (1787–1869) distinguished photopic (daylight, colour) vision from scotopic (monochrome, night-time) vision, observed internal reflections in the eye and helped found the science of experimental psychology, formalizing the more intuitive subjectivism propounded by Goethe. See Isaac Newton, *Opticks, or a Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections and Colours of Light* (New York, NY: Dover, 1952); Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, trans. Charles Lock Eastlake (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1970); Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*, trans. Gloria Custance, foreword Timothy Druckrey (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2006) especially ch. 6.

aperture and white balance, and send a white noise signal rather than an image. Movie cameras simply overexpose the filmstrip. Alternative methods, like Galileo’s famous tracings of sunspots derived from casting an indirect image of the sun into a camera obscura, create only representations: indirect records, not presentations; more or less fantastical pictures, never the sun in its raw reality. The only alternative is apotropaism: using filters so strong they cut out all but the smallest portion of the available light. Thus the source of all light is intrinsically invisible.

After the eyes themselves, the most light-sensitive organ of the human body is the skin. The classic image of the sun worshipper is ecstatic, sensual, often erotic, a figure with closed eyes. In desert movies, where the sun has a major narrative as well as symbolic function, this sensuality must be balanced against the potential fatality of excessive exposure to the sun. The skin will burn, as the eyes will go blind – the kind of visionary blindness which the intense, pale blue of Peter O’Toole’s eyes in *Lawrence of Arabia* always evokes for me. In this extreme environment, madness, or at least a burning away of pretence and custom, may threaten protagonists, or alternatively be embraced by them or by the narrative. The desert sun is a motif, crossing through melodramas, westerns, war films and arthouse movies. Characteristically substituted or supplemented by images of bodies and landscapes, the sun itself is marginalized, seen for the most part only in its effects. The frequency of the desert motif results from the extremity it depicts. The desert permits an extreme moment of exposure – of visibility and of embodiment. The extreme of visibility was the subject of physical optics from Newton’s first experiments with a prism held to a chink in closed shutters, suggesting an intensity too visceral to be observed directly. At the other extreme, since Goethe and Purkinje, physiological optics has insisted on the phenomenological specificity of the individual perception of light and colour, and on the observation that the eyes are a source of visual stimulus as well as receivers.² This polarity governed the history of nineteenth-century optics. Hence the significance of Cray’s reference to Goethe’s student Turner: the extremes of physical and physiological optics situate the painter’s embrace of the individualist principles of a physiological optics as opposed to the objective geometries of an earlier physical optics. In a purely technical sense, this dialectic between Newtonian physics and Goethean psychological optics appeared to have been resolved by the Commission Internationale de l’Eclairage, the body charged with standardizing illumination and colour, at its 1931 congress, which adopted a statistically average ‘standard observer’ as the figure that could reconcile the two schools. But this standard observer never looked at the sun: ‘normal’ test subjects were asked to respond to cards under electric light. Their responses were aggregated according to the ‘social physics’ of Adolphe Quetelet (1796–1874), who adapted the statistical and probabilistic methods used in astronomy and meteorology to the study of the statistical ‘laws’ guiding social relations. The

- 3 See Sean F. Johnston, *A History of Light and Colour Measurement: Science in the Shadows* (Philadelphia, PA and Bristol: Institute of Physics, 2001).

- 4 Rick Altman, 'The material heterogeneity of recorded sound', in Altman (ed.), *Sound Theory/Sound Practice* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 5–31, 15–16.
- 5 Kevin J. Donnelly, *Film Music: Critical Approaches* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), pp. 2–5.
- 6 Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: British Film Institute, 1987); Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Royal S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994); Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001); Russell Lack, *Twenty Four Frames Under: a Buried History of Film Music* (London: Quartet, 1997).
- 7 See Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), especially pp. 109–14.

construction of a standard observer from such statistical averaging, however, provided a managerial solution, one which remained controversial but which, due to the hostilities between partner nations over the ensuing fifteen years, became the de facto norm for light and colour measurement.³

Immersion in sunlight is therefore universally mediated. Although we understand the chemistry, the spectrum and the radiance of the sun, we must still observe it through instruments, construct fictive persons like the CIE's 'standard observer' or indeed the implied observer of Turner's late masterpieces. In cinema we create fictions which, like Turner's scarcely visible canvases, take us to the fictive desert; the location where faith, fealty and truth to self are tested. It is not the physics of light but the limits of perception and endurance which are assayed in this crucible.

As the sun is so difficult to film, with its manifestation of an extreme where vision and blindness, warmth and pain intersect, its image requires a supplement, or indeed a substitution. Among the cinema's repertoire of codes this supplementation might take a verbal form, a graphic form (such as writing), or some combination of sound and music. In general, it is sound and music that have most commonly stood alongside, beneath, beside or in place of visual depictions of sunlight in cinema. My purpose in this essay, then, is to *listen* to cinematic sunlight.

A recent example occurs in Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven*. The good knight Balian is shipwrecked on the shores of the Holy Land. As the sun rises, we see him in long shot traversing a landscape of sand. He falls to his knees beside a pool, where his drinking is interrupted by the arrival of the black horse that, in the previous scene, we had seen him free from the wreck. Dashing to grab the horse's halter, he proceeds to soothe it. This is followed by a cut to a long shot across sand in which we see two approaching Saracens on horseback. The sequence is accompanied throughout by the sound of wind: wind blowing grains of sand, wind in the fronds of palm trees. Other sound effects are laid over this backdrop: the splashing of water, the horse's gentle neigh, the sound of a short run through the pool. At the risk of committing the indelicacy of confusing sound with music,⁴ it seems appropriate to describe the wind sounds according to their pitch and timbre. The blowing grains hiss at the higher end of the sound spectrum, surrounded by a deeper reverberation of air, an imitation perhaps of the sound wind makes swirling in the cavity of the ear. Unsurprisingly grainy in timbre, the sand is also visualized in swirls blowing across the dunes, while the heat is also evoked by Orlando Bloom's staggering walk.

We are now largely familiar, as Kevin Donnelly notes,⁵ with scholarship on film scores that is either musicological or semiotic, and we can identify some already canonical texts by Claudia Gorbman, Caryl Flinn, Kathryn Kalinak and Royal Brown (we might add Anahid Kassabian and Russell Lack), which manage to draw together the formal analysis of musicology with the social commitment of semiotics.⁶ What might still be lacking, despite the best efforts of Michel Chion,⁷ is a

discussion of sound as such, and the possibility that music is not so much a discrete element of film as an increasingly integrated aspect of sound design.

The musical score is stark and abrupt: a series of bowed notes on the cello, with grace notes and melismata performing an arabesque around the central four notes. Much of the score for the film is orchestral, composed and conducted by Harry Gregson-Williams. These few spartan notes contrast with the full orchestra that accompanies the bulk of the scored elements of the film. Because of its simplicity, here the music does something else, opening up a way of thinking about the sonification of the sun. At this point the cello notes enter the soundscape – which for the previous twenty seconds has been naturalistic – functioning as dramatic indicators, matching the unexpected whinny from the horse with a hard attack on the bow modulating to a trill. The use of quarter tones, the absence of harmony and consequent dependence on melody mean that the use of four basic notes (in conformity with the description of *maqamat*, the modal scales at the heart of classical Arabic music), along with the vocal quality of the attack with its evocation of the glottal stop and the rhythmic structure of accent rather than beat, all characterize the musical component of the soundscape as Arabic. The dramatic quality comes not only from the intrinsic surprise of the music but from its alienness, serving as a reminder that, having survived natural disaster, the protagonist is now threatened by cultural dangers. This rather beautiful, and to that extent autonomous, musical phrase thus carries out two narrative tasks: to establish the diegetic realm of the Arab world, and to indicate a narrative turn. It is also there to signal the particular presence of culture, even in what has so far appeared to audience and protagonist alike as a wilderness. For instance, one Saracen will translate the other as saying that ‘this is his land’, indicating with a gesture what would otherwise have appeared as open land to a contemporary European traveler and as *terra incognita* to a modern audience. To the extent that it is employed in such work, the music is disengaged, and its function is to disengage (the audience) from the natural environment. So here, despite the presence of heat and light, the music is not the signifier of sunlight but operates more conventionally as an indicator of place and story.

In this sequence, for instance, the key signifier of the sun’s heat and light is the grainy shimmer of the windblown sand, a sound which continues beneath the noise of drinking and grappling with the horse to rise to the surface again as the sequence turns to the new arrivals on the scene. This environment of sound, in which the musical notes then take their place, is the broader natural scene which underpins the narrative of geographical displacement and cultural difference, the opportunity and threat posed by the horse’s return. Undergirding the whole scene, the soundscape sculpts the specific task of the musical sequence, which in its instrumentation, scoring and performance seems to have some of the improvisatory quality so intrinsic to the classical Islamic tradition. Given

the crucial place of the Crusades in western musical history – the Crusaders brought back both the words and the instruments we now call organ, lute and guitar, and those once known as rebec and nakkers – there is a historical ghosting at play in the music, an evocation of the secular mediaeval music of troubadours and *trouvères*. This analysis could be developed to suggest that while the sand has its specific job in marking a place and its ambience, the music is engaged in time: the narrative time of an action and the historical time of a cultural communication, whether conducted through trade or violence. Without necessarily communicating some *thing*, the music implies communication as a time-based activity. The sun, however, is sonically positioned outside of that cultural and temporal nexus signaled by the music in *Kingdom of Heaven*. The autonomy of the music, which is evoked in this example by its formal elegance, marks its difference from the scene on which it comments. It is the cultural signifier which brands the sound of the wind-blown sand as its Other, as nature: *outside* of time, *outside* communication.

The first two scenes of *Lawrence of Arabia* take place without musical accompaniment (although the film is preceded by an orchestral introduction). The film opens with the fatal motorcycle accident that killed T. E. Lawrence in Lincolnshire. In the second scene, we are taken back to the British headquarters in Cairo as Lawrence is assigned a mission: to find Faisal, head of the Hashemite Bedouin. A cut takes us from a closeup of Lawrence blowing out a match to the moment before a desert sunrise. Composer Maurice Jarre, later to become a pioneer of electronic scores for films including *Witness* (Peter Weir, 1985), opens the nondiegetic scoring, which will lead into the major musical theme of the film with a quiet discord, as of an orchestra tuning but more disciplined, closer to the tonal blocks familiar from the music of Iannis Xenakis or Gyorgy Ligeti. The sound of Lawrence's breath on the match continues for a few frames after the cut, giving way to the sustained tones of brass and strings, punctuated by a metallic string, perhaps of a harp or harpsichord being plucked, and then the distinctive resonation of the ondes Martenot.⁸ As the volume increases, so the massed tone moves up the scale in time with the sun's rising, adding flutes and woodwind, and climaxing in a clash of cymbals as we cut to a daylight desert landscape and the introduction of the film's main theme, borne by the full orchestra playing almost in unison, with a ripple of multiple harps underpinning it in a rhythmic pattern that will soon be associated with the trotting of camels.

The massed pianissimo chord that accompanies the sunrise – filmed at the normal frame-rate but speeded up in postproduction – contrasts strongly with the symphonic theme that follows it. The orchestral theme forms an association with the shape of the rolling dunes as graphically inclined as Eisenstein's account of the score for the Battle on the Ice in *Alexander Nevsky* (1938).⁹ But it is also the case that the micropolyphony of the sunrise score is intensely evocative of the sun itself, isomorphic to

8 The ondes Martenot is an electronic musical instrument invented in 1928 by Maurice Martenot, producing an eerie, oscillating tone.

9 Sergei M. Eisenstein, 'Vertical montage', in Eisenstein, *Selected Works: Volume II – Towards a Theory of Montage*, ed. Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor, trans. Michael Glenny (London: British Film Institute, 1991), pp. 327–99.

¹⁰ Richard Anderson, supervising sound editor on the reconstruction of the film, even surmises that the preservation of the master negatives may have been a result of Columbia's desire to preserve stock desert footage. David E. Stone, 'Patching up "Lawrence of Arabia": an interview with supervising sound editor Richard Anderson', *Moviesound Newsletter*, vol. 1, nos 1 and 2 (1989), <<http://hollywoodlostandfound.net/sound/lawrence/>> [accessed 18 March 2010].

¹¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley W. Blomster (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 47.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

the extent that the increasing light level is somehow experientially of the same shape as the increasing volume of sound. A similar use of atonal massed musical sounds accompanies segments of the sequence depicting the crossing of the Nefud desert, especially notable in documentary images of dust devils. Shot on 65mm Panavision, transferred to 70mm for sound, and with a stereophonic recording, premium screenings featured 70mm projection; even in Cinemascope, the impressive and immersive spectacle of natural wonder is an important feature of the film.¹⁰ Jarre's scoring of these scenes with very contemporary formal music techniques counterbalances the coding for the 'sword and sandals' epic produced by the full orchestral major melody in the manner of Alfred Newman's score for *The Robe* (Henry Koster, 1953) or Miklos Rozsa's for *Ben Hur* (William Wyler, 1959).

Nonetheless, although it connotes the alienness associated with atonal and electronic music (for example in Louis and Bebe Barron's score for *Forbidden Planet* [Fred M. Wilcox, 1956]), the more atonal sections share with the emphatic orchestral themes the peculiarity of swamping all other sound. This is most dramatically the case with the opening atonal chord. Writing of the strict rule-governed structures of late Schönberg in a passage titled 'Musical domination of nature', Theodor Adorno describes the twelve-tone technique as 'infinitely static by virtue of its total independence of any historical forces',¹¹ aligning it with Spengler's dark vision of total mastery and total rationalization. This totality arises from 'the fact that nothing heteronomous remains which is not absorbed into the continuum of this technique'.¹² For Adorno, serialism substitutes the meaning of organization for the organization of musical meaning. For Kant, mastering nature in all its contingency was the necessary preamble to human freedom, but in this total organization of sound in serial composition, Adorno argues, it is freedom itself which becomes contingent, an excess to be structured out of existence by the intensity of musical organization. Deprived of freedom, and in the shadow of Spengler, musical form becomes fatal, where 'Fate is domination reduced to its pure abstraction, and the measure of its destruction is equal to that of its domination: fate is disaster'.¹³ The immense power of serialism's capacity to organize musical materials is an expression of the will to absolute dominance that characterizes the age of its invention. It remains a cultural resource, always afterwards available to sound out the pattern of domination, and its readiness to absorb and overcome every other mode of sound. In its dynamic use of volume and its deployment of sounds from across the whole audible spectrum, Jarre's massed chord overwhelms and annihilates everything other than itself. Along with its rejection of Romanticism, it rejects the human subject, and installs in its stead the abstract purity of infinite order.

Once again, as in *Kingdom of Heaven*, the music ascribes to the sun a role outside of history, associating the sun with a sublime presence whose power is effectively infinite because it is unchanging. In this musical

14 See Johnston, *A History of Light and Colour Measurement*.

expression of the sun, which eradicates the contingencies of location sound, the ahistorical force of nature that is the sun is at once made cultural by its translation into music, yet at the same time, because of its infinity, alienated from finite and ephemeral human culture.¹⁴ The German Romantic composers asserted their individual creative freedom by overcoming nature through their machinery of harmony and melody: this massed microtonal sonification produces an artificial infinity which is equally dominating and destructive, both of nature – now reproduced as its own abstraction – and of the subjectivity that the older musical language produced as its highest expression. The transition to the orchestral theme, then, reinforces rather than challenges that first fatal description of the simultaneously (and paradoxically) cultural and ahistorical moment of sunrise, extracting from it the totalitarian assertion of music's right to organize the sonic environment, to drive out all competition, and now to address the audience with unabashedly affective tropes. It is this sweeping assertion which offers us the fiction of Lawrence's personal liberation through his confrontation with the desert. It is to Lean's credit as a director (and equally to the Brechtian qualities of O'Toole's performance) that this illusion of authenticity, this romance of subjectivity, so strongly borne in the main theme, is constantly ironized in the working-through of the narrative.

There is a significant difference between the sonifications of the two sequences analyzed thus far. Jarre's score overwhelms all other sonic elements, while Gregson-Williams's score fits in an overall sound design finally sculpted by supervising sound editor Per Halberg. The Jarre score concentrates on the subjectivity of the protagonist while, in contrast, Halberg's sound design is resonant of the geography, of the time and place of events. In Scott's film, Balian reluctantly takes on the task of leading the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem against Saladin, in the process proving himself a worthy warrior and a man of peace who is finally free to return home. In Lean's, the rebel Romantic Lawrence, gradually maddened by the glory of his conquests, is no longer able to return to a lesser life. The difference between Balian and Lawrence as respectively perfect and imperfect knights – the one growing into the stature of his legend, the other falling victim to it – may explain the difference between the totalitarian qualities of Jarre's score for the latter, and the copresence of music and environmental sound effects in the former. Balian has a place in the world, while Lawrence does not.

Extreme sunlight in film places human figures in their environment, then, as inhabitants or as strangers, sonically referenced in the degree to which the sound of the desert enters the soundtrack. On another axis, the relative weight given to humans and environment appears in the density of the scores. At one extreme lies the human-centred narrative, particularly when driven by group dynamics. Only a few years before *Lawrence of Arabia*, J. Lee Thompson's *Ice-Cold in Alex* (1958) eschewed anything more than minimal sound effects for the desert setting, employing a dramatic score which mirrors almost exclusively the

physical effort and emotional tenor of the protagonists as they come to realize, for all their differences, the depth of their community, deploying musical motifs for each character. As one character says in the denouement, the solidarity of a group divided by nationality, gender and class is forged in their common struggle ‘against the desert, the greatest enemy’. That enemy, excluded from the circle of human relations, is left mute in Thompson’s film. At the opposite end of this scale lies the tale of individual turmoil, where the desert and its sun play a more allegorical role. In *The Garden of Allah*, directed in lush Technicolor for David O. Selznick by Richard Boleslawski, this characteristic performance-driven scoring of classical cinema meets a rather different and more intensely personal tale of redemption. Adapted twice before, Richard Hitchens’s novel – the melodramatic tale of the doomed love of a mysterious woman and a runaway monk – is accompanied by a score composed by Max Steiner. In the scene in which the title first appears as a line of dialogue, Steiner’s association with Gustav Mahler is apparent in the broad strokes of orchestral colour, especially in the strings, and the lack of an imperative to provide a melodic structure, concentrating instead on the affective power of tonal colour. The ease of the movement into choral singing is perhaps also part of that legacy. In this scene, Boris (Charles Boyer) has just been embarrassed into giving away his crucifix by some teasing girls, as his future wife Domini (Marlene Dietrich) and the dashing Count Ferdinand (Basil Rathbone) look on. There is no diegetic sound except dialogue. Boyer’s footsteps, as he moves off camera under the shade, and again as he walks his horse briskly away, are inaudible, and there are no incidental sounds of clothing, set or props. Synchronous recording of dialogue takes absolute precedence over all other auditory elements in the mix. Steiner’s score must match this dynamic, sacrificing any ambitions it might have towards a purely musical development to the requirement that the speech between the protagonists must be audible above all else.

As in *Ice-Cold in Alex*, elements of the score appear to be connected not only to the dramatic tenor of the scene but to specific characters. The long dark chord that follows Boris’s embarrassment acquires a high, sustained note on the violin as Domini steps into centre frame, aligned with another note on the bass as Ferdinand joins her. Beneath the dialogue between Domini and Ferdinand the orchestra is reduced to a much smaller group of instruments. A new theme emerges after Ferdinand alters the tenor of the conversation by remarking that ‘A man who fears to acknowledge his own god is unwise to set foot in the desert’. At this point a female choir can be heard, high in the register, evoking sacred chorales of the nineteenth century. The professionalism of the singers suggests, at some level, an enactment of sincerity reflecting the sentimentalization of religious faith in the source material. But in this context it strikes as insincere, in part because of its association with Technicolor, already in the 1930s a byword for glitz and empty spectacle,

but more particularly because it is so obviously a pastiche of an older musical form.

This feeling of inauthenticity even extends to the sense of subjectivity that normally is almost impossible not to ascribe to a singing voice (even when massed in a choir). This floating subjectivity is not anchored in or by any of the film's characters. Neither the swashbuckling Count nor the dewy-eyed Domini, musing on her love for the enigmatic Boris, could be thought of as experiencing a spiritual moment. The wordless song begins under the Count's admonition concerning lack of faith, rising as he speaks his lines about the desert as the garden of Allah. As the dialogue ends, it fills the soundtrack with its string accompaniment while the image pans to reveal a landscape of dunes, first bounded by a gateway, then free of any man-made frame. If there is no human subject to which we can ascribe this sound, we are left with the only remaining alternative: that the song is the song of the desert itself.

Three positions must be accounted for: Boris has lost (or at least mislaid) his faith; Domini has not found hers; Ferdinand admits only that faith is necessary if a man is to be true to himself. Between the true that is lost, the not-yet-true and the agnostic, the desert sings its chorale from the position of truth, a truth which is inhuman and outside of time. The irony here is that true faith, the act of believing in that which is not in itself believable, is not only a gift of God but a denial of the self, of subjectivity. The sentimental pretence at religiosity performed by the chorale cannot tell of faith or its loss (it is doomed by its lack of authenticity) but of its displacement. The lost truth, the truth unknown or to come, is displaced from the human protagonists onto the inhuman and voiceless desert. Just as the geographical displacement of Arabia to a Californian backlot undercuts any claim to truth, the translation of the American transcendentalist tradition of nature worship to the dunes of a fictional Arabia rings as hollow as the pseudo-plainchant of the chorale. The score has become a fictional version of itself, first as pastiche, then through association not only with a fiction film, and a fiction within a fiction (the Californian desert standing for Arabia), but with the fictive ascription of subjectivity to a landscape. The orientalist scenario is, as in the other examples, the place where a male protagonist can discover or rediscover his authentic being, sensual and divine. But in this instance the score tells us that this is an impossibility.

The attempt to ascribe sacredness not to an affect but to an object (sand, the desert, the sun that realizes this environment) removes it from the individual in whom alone it has meaning. The ascription can be read as an attempt to resolve the failure of faith to find social resonance in the narrative, but perhaps also in the society of artists responsible for the film, and in the wider society beyond it. It results in removing all authenticity from the actors reading their lines, still more from their two-dimensional pictures on the screen. Where in *Lawrence of Arabia* the image track ironizes the epic qualities of the score, in *The Garden of Allah* the score ironizes the claims to faith from the terminally

inauthentic. The wistful melancholia of the film leans, when heard, dangerously close to nihilism. The desert sun may still illuminate the true man, but that truth may be only the appalling emptiness of the faithless soul.

More than seventy years separate these examples. It would be glib and unwarranted to make any of them stand as exemplary of classicism, of the epic, or of contemporary sound design practice. It is more instructive to enumerate them as possible positions in a game in which the stakes are the limits of perception and the value of a human life. Both *Kingdom of Heaven* and *Lawrence of Arabia* are easily read as antiwar films – the one appearing during the Iraq invasion, the other during the Vietnam War – yet their symptomatic and symmetrical assessments are fundamentally different, arguing respectively that the management of defeat is an honorable calling and that victory can destroy. It is the oldest of the three that in some respects is the most strikingly modern, with its abidingly nihilist dressing-up box visuals and its use of music to resolve irresolvable dilemmas, just as it simultaneously serves to paper over a clumsy edit that breaks the 180-degree rule halfway through Ferdinand's line 'The desert, Madame, is the garden of Allah'. In all three films the confrontation between image and score is also a confrontation between temporalities, narrative and history on the one hand and the unchanging on the other, and between subjectivity and environment. The desert abides, but it is at the same time an experience. Only in *Kingdom of Heaven*, on the soundtrack of wind-blown sand, is there the sense that the desert is a movable feast and that it has its own dynamic beyond functioning as a stage for whatever personal epiphanies might occur in its presence. In *Lawrence of Arabia* it operates as presence, in an almost Heideggerian sense: a pledge of the givenness of the world in all its fullness, despite our inability to grasp it, blinded by our frames of reference as much as by the unbearable brilliance of unmediated being. In *The Garden of Allah*, however, it represents that which is not; it reflects absence – the mirror of a God without believers. A curious effect in both *Lawrence* and *The Garden* is that deserts are presented as strikingly immaterial, most of all because they are unheard. Yet in all three films, the desert is meticulously spatialized: removed from the ordinary, located and bounded. Its most characteristic feature, the sun, appears in the margins, as effect and affect.

The history of blindness lies underneath the history of light. The history of illumination is a story of shields against glare, of indirect lighting. The history of solar observation is one of indirect vision and of afterimages, the darkness produced by light. Each of these films suggests in its own way that the desert produces visionaries, that it is the light – of nature, of God, of truth, of authenticity – and that even if this light produces its own darkness, the only darkness is in a man's soul. They reject the inevitable maculation of vision, whether that occurs in subjective perception or in the objective world, the mote in the eye or the dust in the projector beam. The weighty metaphor of blindness is

ubiquitous in our culture: the blind hand of the market, the sightless measurements of probabilistic science and social physics, the 'denigration' (unfortunate term) of vision. Both rationalist and spiritual quests for truth go beyond the visible, meeting at the extreme in a Pythagorean mysticism for which the abstract order of number explains both the physical universe and our perceptions of it. Vision itself is not, in this instance, the givenness of world and perceiver to one another, merely another phenomenon demanding a mathematical account that is not itself in any way optical. Visual perception in this perspective is a veil of illusion, something to be corrected in visionary experience which is ironically non-visual, or in experimental science whose final expression is in the abstract language of arithmetic. Such annihilation of sight cannot be denied by asserting the purity of vision, the absolute light. What this brief analysis seems to show is that the affliction of the eye requires not correction but alliance. Sound can register the experience of the desert sun in ways that cameras physically cannot, constrained as they are by their human-like over-sensitivity to the uncontrollable solar lustre. The development of sound technologies, from optical in the 1930s to magnetic in the 1960s and multitrack and Dolby in the 2000s, clearly adds to the range of materials available for sound design, most of all the rendering of fine grain: it would be difficult to replicate without irony the honeyed sonorities of *The Garden of Allah* on contemporary kit. The new equipment multiplies options, and yet the legend of truth in extremis still structures the soundscapes of films as disparate as *The English Patient* (Anthony Mingella, 1996) and *The Sheltering Sky* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1990) with their themes of blindness, disorientation, betrayal and despair. Sound's place of work in desert films is the boundary between the physical and physiological, the intolerable reality of the sun and the intensity of even partial perception of it. The work of sound in the three films analyzed, and in so many others, is not to offer false resolutions, narrative or formal, or to ironize and in so doing accept the rift between freedom and form at the heart of our rationality, but to destroy the hegemony of vision by demonstrating its limits. Only thus can sight be restored to its correct place in the world.

Televisual memory

AMY HOLDSWORTH

In early 2009, Sky News commemorated twenty years of broadcasting with an ‘anniversary promo’, a thirty-second sequence which endeavoured to promote the channel as the ‘first for breaking news’. The sequence functions as a montage of iconic news events and images, literally embodied by an anonymous female viewer. Archive footage of selected events – Nelson Mandela’s release, the fall of the Berlin Wall, Margaret Thatcher’s exit from and Tony Blair’s arrival at Downing Street – are intercut with computer-generated imagery of the viewer’s physical responses to the event: a pupil dilates, hairs stand on end. But events are also integrated with the responses: a tear falls and becomes the tsunami wave crashing onto a South Pacific holiday resort; a heart pounds and images pulsate within the frame; the nervous system crackles and threads between the images of a cameraman running from the collapsing World Trade Centre and paramedics running towards the victims of the London bombings of 2005.

The montage operates as a particular orchestration of a moment of televisual memory. In this example it condenses a series of moments pulled from across a span of twenty years to produce an intense and complex sequence. The order of the events makes little sense chronologically or in terms of classical narrative, remembered events are pulled out of a linear time frame, but it draws its meaning from a pattern of visual and aural rhymes, matching and mirroring the movements and sounds of the selected archive footage. For example, the cut from the images of the tsunami to the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall is made sense of through the rhyming of movement – a wall of waves and the wall of concrete both crash to the ground.

Arguably designed to produce an affective response but also to reflect upon the emotional and affective potential of television – specifically

news – the sequence is heavily constructed, manipulative, even sentimental. The promo opens with the frowning face of a blonde-haired, blue-eyed young girl. Framed in the dark to the left of the screen, a solitary tear rolls down her cheek and a zoom into an extreme closeup of the tear reveals the image of another blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl reflected within it; the iconic image of the abducted child Madeleine McCann, immediately acting as a form of emotional shorthand. The following series of flashes and sensations draws to a close with the pronouncement from Barack Obama that ‘the world has changed and we must change with it’. It is here that the camera pulls out from Obama’s image and it is revealed as a reflection within a tear, this time on the face of a blonde-haired, blue-eyed woman, whilst the caption, white on black, reads ‘20 years older’. What is primarily of interest for me is the representation of an experience of television and how that is filtered through the lens of memory. The act of viewing Sky News is presented as a visceral, immediate and intimate experience but also one formed over twenty years. The world, the broadcaster and the viewer have changed yet the sequence also returns to where it begins, thereby characterizing the ebb and flow of time, memory and television.

Whilst the promo operates as a canon of memorable television moments, I am not arguing that it is, in itself, part of that list. For the purposes of this essay it functions along with other examples as one of the moments which punctuate the flow of television; moments which summon, manage and even simulate reflection and remembering. I have employed the term ‘televisual memory’ to refer to the representation and forms of memory on television, but as examples of ‘televisual memory’ they also capture a sense of the complexity of our experience of television and offer a commentary on the similarities between the mechanisms of both television and memory.

The relationship between television and memory is an underexplored area of study which stems perhaps from the familiar narrative in which television is seen as an ‘amnesiac’, responsible for the ‘undermining of memory.’¹ There are a series of notable dismissals of the medium, but we might begin with Fredric Jameson, who writes in *Postmodernism* that ‘Memory seems to play no role in television, commercial or otherwise . . . nothing here haunts the mind or leaves its afterimages in the manner of the great moments of film’. Jameson observes that ‘the blockage of fresh thinking before this solid little window against which we strike our heads’ is ‘not unrelated to precisely that whole or total flow we observe through it’.² Models of television textuality have long been dominated by Raymond Williams’s concept of ‘flow’, and it is through this concept that Jameson and others envisage television not only as producing lost images and lost time but as inducing a wider vacuum within cultural memory resulting in historical amnesia; according to Stephen Heath, television produces ‘forgetfulness not memory, *flow* not history’.³

An oft-cited series of essays collected in Patricia Mellencamp’s *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism* has been foundational for the

1 Mary Ann Doane, ‘Information, crisis and catastrophe’, in Patricia Mellencamp (ed.), *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), p. 228.

2 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 70.

3 Stephen Heath, ‘Representing television’, in Patricia Mellencamp (ed.), *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), p. 279.

4 I refer most specifically to Doane's 'Information, crisis and catastrophe', pp. 222–39, and Patricia Mellencamp's 'TV time and catastrophe, or beyond the pleasure principle of television', pp. 240–66. However, Heath's 'Representing television' and Margaret Morse's 'An ontology of everyday distraction: the freeway, the mall and television' also mark a particular moment of cultural criticism where television is consigned the function of amnesia.

5 Doane, 'Information, crisis and catastrophe', p. 228.

6 I am referring here to the popularity of discourses of trauma and therapy within discussions of television, and their correspondence with the dominant modes of memory discourse. As Kerwin Klein observes in part of his analysis of the language of memory discourse, 'the old key words of psychoanalysis have given way to a new preferred lexicon: *trauma, transference, melancholia, mourning, and working through* recur time and again'. Kerwin Klein, 'On the emergence of memory in historical discourse', *Representations*, no. 69 (2000), p. 141.

7 Mimi White, 'The attractions of television: reconsidering liveness', in Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (eds), *MediaSpace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 79.

8 Amelie Hastie, 'TV on the brain', *Screen*, vol. 50, no. 2 (2009), p. 224.

9 John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London: IB Tauris, 2000).

10 Bill Schwarz, 'Media times/historical times', *Screen*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2004), p. 105.

11 Annette Kuhn, 'A journey through memory', in Susannah Radstone (ed.), *Memory and Methodology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 189.

theoretical construction of television as amnesiac.⁴ The essays clearly mark a moment in cultural criticism that attempted to tackle what television is. For Doane and Mellencamp in particular, it was the representation of the catastrophic media event which became both expressive and emblematic of the characteristics of the medium. Using the Challenger space shuttle disaster of 1986 as their example, they both argue that such moments stand out from and arrest the flow of television and of daily life and work to illuminate the medium's defining features of flow, liveness and repetition. It is only 'moments which can be isolated from the fragmented flow of information, moments with an impact which disrupts the ordinary routine'⁵ that can enter the realm of memory, the rest of television is lost from memory. This privileging of the traumatic media moment in the discussion of television's amnaestic effect also stems from the dominant modes of memory discourse itself.⁶

If these understandings of the ontology of television, the 'privileging of catastrophe and disaster as uniquely expressive of televisuality',⁷ have been derived from the medium's dominant textual characteristics, how might a focus on television's textuality open up other ways of understanding its relationship with memory? By reflecting on the potential patterns and similarities between the textualities of memory and television, we can capture a sense of the experience of watching and remembering television. Using memory as a framework allows, in Amelie Hastie's words, a 'linking – and likening – [of] aesthetic and emotional states'.⁸

This linking and likening of aesthetic and emotional states also characterizes the paradigm of 'witness' and 'working through' as conceptualized by John Ellis in his work *Seeing Things*.⁹ As Bill Schwarz writes:

Ellis's description of television consciously echoes Freud on memory: misremembering, misinterpreting, the continual collapsing of narrative, narratives located in 'the wrong' place, strange displacements, the merging of stories, repetitions. This is a complex, overdetermined process in which the objective is to seek some kind of provisional order in the face of perpetual irresolution and chaos. Ellis is not suggesting that television creates a social archive of collective memory; he is proposing a different, more dynamic, model in which television is a relation, or process, which functions rather like subjective memory.¹⁰

Schwarz's comment allows me to draw a parallel with the idea of the 'memory text'. As Annette Kuhn writes, the form of the 'memory text' is 'characteristically collagist, fragmentary, timeless' and can 'call up, in words, or with the directness and apparent purity of sounds and images, a sense of what remembering feels like'.¹¹ Memory texts in this sense invite empathy and identification, drawing upon our familiarity with the experience of memory.

- 12 A similar suggestion is made by Marita Sturken in her essay on the endless replay, reenactment and analysis of the O. J. Simpson saga. Marita Sturken, 'Television vectors and the making of a media event: the helicopter, the freeway chase and national memory', in James Friedman (ed.), *Reality Squared: Televisual Discourses on the Real* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 200.
- 13 Andrew Hoskins, 'Flashbulb memories, psychology and media studies: fertile ground for interdisciplinarity?', *Memory Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2009), p. 149.
- 14 For example *The 100 Greatest TV Moments* (Channel 4, 1999) or *Doctor Who's Greatest Moments* (BBC3, 2009).
- 15 See James Walters, 'Repeat viewings: television analysis in the DVD age', in James Bennett and Tom Brown (eds), *Film and Television After DVD* (London: Routledge, 2008).
- 16 Jason Jacobs, 'Issues of judgement and value in television studies', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4 (2001), p. 435.

Thus if television can be considered a 'process' likened to the experience of subjective memory and the complicated dynamics of remembering and forgetting, we might see how the ebb and flow of television takes on the character of the 'memory text'.¹² Whilst the attempt to tackle this argument in relation to 'television itself' is a fearsome challenge, it is possible to pull out of the flow specific moments which could themselves be characterized as 'memory texts': moments such as the Sky News promo, that evoke reflection on the relationship between memory and television as texts and experiences, and which respond to and reveal the need, as Andrew Hoskins writes, to treat 'media as possessing complexities as deep as memory itself'.¹³

Whilst the idea of the 'memorable moment' is central for forms of nostalgia programming,¹⁴ the moment of televisual memory operates differently here and should be viewed in relation to two specific considerations. First, television as a sequential medium and its characteristics of segmentation and flow, and secondly, the development of time-shifting and digital technologies, where the possibilities and potentials of analyzing isolated television moments have been amplified by the DVD age.¹⁵ In analyzing these moments we might usefully consider the relationship between part and whole, between moment or fragment and narrative; and, as Jason Jacobs writes, 'in thinking of part-whole relations then we might usefully turn to the sense of the 'fragment' as something complete in itself and yet implying a larger whole'.¹⁶ What I will explore in this essay is how this relationship or possible tension is illuminated by the televisual montage, the segmented nature of television flow and the treatment of archive and still images on television. The montage is significant as it offers a particular kind of moment, a fragment comprised of fragments, part of a whole and a whole made of parts.

My argument will concentrate on a selection of montage sequences from a series of television programmes, different in genre and address. As sequences they act as both expressive of television's textuality and as examples of memory texts, or more specifically commemoration texts, each designed as a site of televisual commemoration and reflection. As 'memory montages' they work to reflect upon, construct, even manipulate televisual memory, playing with 'afterimages' and notions of haunting, illuminating the forms and function of repetition on television.

My first example apparently returns us to an exemplary media moment of trauma. Much of the literature on memory, often drawn from the study of the Holocaust, has become dominated by discussions of traumatic memory. This is particularly evident within the existing work on television and memory with its overreliance on the fragments of catastrophe and the media news event. In these examples the formal characteristics of the media news event stand in for the medium in general and coincide with the characteristics of the psychical activity of trauma. These characteristics are clearly evoked in a sequence from a programme commissioned to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the

11 September attacks on the USA. In *9/11: Out of the Blue* (tx. 11 September 2006, Five), a poem written by Simon Armitage and performed by Rufus Sewell, was combined with television footage of the event and the testimony of eye-witnesses and bereaved relations. Armitage's poem is written from the perspective of a British businessman trapped in the first tower, and the sequence I refer to 'documents' the 'moment' of the second plane's collision with the south tower. The selection of footage and its re-presentation is carefully constructed around the poetry to evoke a sense of shock and incomprehension.

The sequence begins with Sewell, standing by an office window: 'I was fighting for breath / I was pounding the glass / when a shape flew past / A snapshot only / The shape of a cross, as it were / Just a blur.' We then cut to the testimonies of two witnesses who recall the moment the second plane hit. The following verse is accompanied by four different shots, taken from different angles and vantage points, all of which show the incline of the plane as it approaches the towers but which each time cut just before the point of collision. This effectively draws out the temporal frame of the action and echoes the sentiment of the poem.¹⁷

The first archive image of the sequence is a static shot of the top half of the World Trade Centre with smoke pouring from a black wound in the right hand tower. In the right third of the frame a black shape in the white sky flies in, its motion slowing from normal speed to slow motion. As the moment of catastrophe is slowed, delayed and repeated, the diegetic sound of the footage is removed and Sewell's choked voice is accompanied by an echoing, atmospheric sound. As the verse continues, and just before the moment of collision, we cut to another static shot, this time of the New York skyline viewed from under the Brooklyn Bridge. Smoke trails from the right tower off to left of frame. This time the plane is viewed heading, again in slow motion, behind the bars of the skyscrapers and towards the towers. The third piece of footage is a closeup tracking shot of the plane, following the same line of movement as the previous shot. As the plane twists in the sky the camera movement parallels the poem's description, 'tipping' and 'swooning'. Then the footage is slowed down further so we see the plane 'frame by frame by frame' as it approaches the tower in the right side of the frame. Prior to the word 'burn', the film cuts to a different angle which shows the plane, this time moving from right to left as it whines towards the tower, and cuts again a second before collision. On the word 'burned', diegetic sound is reinserted and normal speed resumed, effectively emphasizing the plane's impact. A quick cut then places us with a witness below the looming tower as it explodes. Four more shots of the explosion from different angles follow, and the screams and commotion audible on the soundtrack fade quickly out, into the steady bell-like echo on the soundtrack and back to the sound of Sewell's voice.

The shifting angles and direction of movement, the manipulation of speed, the removal and reinsertion of diegetic sound, the dramatic

¹⁷ 'But detail. Fact / An engine. A wing / I sort of swayed, sort of thing. / sort of swooned, that fear / when something designed to be far / comes illogically near. / Then it banked. It scooped. It was tipping / Not dipping away, but towards / On the turn. / Then the groan and the strain / as it turned / I see it now, over and over / frame by frame by frame. / Then everything / Burned ...'
Simon Armitage, *Out of the Blue* (Enitharmon: London, 2008), p. 23.

18 Verse nine of Armitage's poem continues: 'And I thought – how crazy is this – / this can't be the case. / I actually thought there's got to be some mistake: / they'll wind back the film, / call back the plane, / they'll try this again. / The day will be fine, / put back as it was. This time they'll steer! / Because lightning never strikes once, / let alone twice.' Armitage, *Out of the Blue*, pp. 23–4.

19 Hayden White, 'The modernist event', in Vivian Sobchack (ed.), *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television and the Modern Event* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), p. 20.

20 Andrew Hoskins, *Televising War: From Vietnam to Iraq* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 6.

21 The verse concludes: 'It must be a mirage. / It must be a mirror. / That thought didn't last. / That thought was a lie / which darkened and died the second it formed. / Then it dawned. / What else is a plane but a flying bomb?' Armitage, *Out of the Blue*, p. 24.

22 Thomas Elsaesser, "'One train may be hiding another': private history, memory and national identity, *Screening the Past*, no. 6 (1999) <<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/reruns/r0499/terr6b.htm>> [accessed 12 January 2005].

23 Richard Dienst, *Still Life in Real Time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 129.

24 Karen Lury, *Interpreting Television* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), p. 87.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 116.

content of the poetry and the editing rhythm all serve to heighten the sense of disbelief and horror.¹⁸ But the sequence also highlights the characteristics of interruption ('out of the blue') and repetition ('it must be a mirage, it must be a mirror') that define the representation of the traumatic media event as it has been explored theoretically. In the case of 9/11, the literal repetition of the event, the second plane hitting the second tower, seemingly propels the argument onto another level.

In his essay on the media event, Hayden White writes that 'holocaustal' events of the twentieth century 'function in the consciousness of certain social groups exactly as infantile traumas are conceived to function in the psyche of neurotic individuals. This means that they cannot be simply forgotten and put out of mind, but neither can they be adequately remembered.'¹⁹ For writers like White and Hoskins, this representational mode results in the collapse of memory and narrative meaning. Through the production of a 'perpetual present',²⁰ the repetition and iconicity of news images inhibits memory and limits our own understanding of and engagement with the events in question. My analysis of the above 'moment' from *Out of the Blue* might be seen to sympathize with these sentiments of White and Hoskins. However, the context of the sequence being re-played within an intriguing and highly affective narrative framework illuminates how, in fact, the event is 'made sense of' through its renarrativization, with Sewell's character, in the conclusion to verse nine, eventually processing the shock and unreality of the second attack.²¹

As Thomas Elsaesser has argued, those bizarre, terrifying, even traumatic fragments that appear on the nightly news bulletins are re-presented via the consolatory function of narrative. Whilst 'history, it seems, has dropped out of sight and grasp between the news flash of today and next month's mini-series', the strategies of repetition and narrativization, of 'retelling, repeating, not working on but working through', offer a way of dealing with those traumatic moments we witness on television.²² Within such a framework, however, television remains restricted to two representational modes, neatly identified by Richard Dienst as 'missiles and melodrama'.²³

These modes coincided in ITN's coverage of the 9/11 attacks on the 12 September 2001, which received heavy criticism. The channel's ten o'clock news that evening concluded with a montage which produced an edited chronological sequence of the last thirty hours, accompanied by the music of composer Gounod. Karen Lury writes that 'the music, although classical, was seen as being too obviously dramatic, and was synchronised to the event (planes crashing, symbols clashing) so that the sequence seemed a little like a music video'.²⁴ This 'super-condensed mini-narrative'²⁵ worked through to the point of closure, binding the event up into a neat package, temporally framed by the musical track. Rendered uncomfortable by its use of music and editing, the sequence serves to remind the viewer of the spectacular quality of the events,

²⁶ For further discussion see, for example, Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* (London: Verso, 2002).

producing a sense of hyperreality and creating a close association with the Hollywood blockbuster – the missiles made melodrama.²⁶

What the sequence also reveals is the attempt of television to produce managed moments of reflection or contemplation. The role of the presenter is key to this effect, the space to reflect signalled in this instance by the words of veteran ITV newsreader Trevor McDonald: ‘So we leave you now with a reminder of some of the harrowing images of those attacks, images which have dominated both our screens and our thoughts over the last thirty hours’. In addition to the news event, these reflective moments are organized by a series of genres and forms, from the concluding montages at the end of major sporting events to the ‘best bits’ of departing contestants in reality entertainment formats such as *Big Brother* (Channel 4, 2000–) and *The X Factor* (ITV, 2004–).

Distanced from the event and commissioned as a memorial, the sequence from *Out of the Blue* offers a different form of reflection than the news montage; instead it comments specifically on the *experience* of viewing the event. The verse itself explicitly refers to the *representation* of the event and its mediation, as the experience of witnessing is constructed as mediated via the filmed image and the characteristic of repetition: ‘I see it now, over and over, frame by frame by frame’, ‘they’ll wind back the film, call back the plane’. Unlike the hurried condensation of recent events, *Out of the Blue* provides both a reflective and a self-reflexive space to consider its own construction as mediated, specifically televisual memory.

The necrologies, or ‘lists of the dead’, which feature in film and television award shows offer a related example of the commemorative montage designed as a reflective moment. They are fragmented sequences presented within, but distinct from, the flow of the evening’s ceremonial entertainment. The 2009 BAFTA Television Awards Ceremony was broadcast on BBC1 and presented by television personality Graham Norton.²⁷ As in the news montage, the words of the presenter work to shift the tone of the evening and ask the audience/viewer to ‘take a few moments to remember the colleagues who aren’t here. The ones we lost over the last year.’ Whilst the award ceremony audience watch the VT from within the theatre, for the television viewer the image cuts from Graham Norton to the opening of the necrology. Twenty-six names feature in the 2009 list, amongst them Patrick McGoochan, Tony Hart, Harold Pinter, Jade Goody, Sir John Mortimer and Wendy Richard. The sequence opens with an iconic moment from *The Prisoner* (ITV, 1967–68) with Patrick McGoochan as Number 6: ‘I will not be pushed, filed, stamped, indexed, briefed, debriefed or numbered. My life is my own.’²⁸ The intensity of McGoochan’s performance shot in closeup, the teasing smile which accompanies the final line, is now placed at the opening of a list of the dead, where its new context within the archive footage invests the moment with irony. Here the closeup moving image of McGoochan quickly fades into a black-and-

²⁷ tx. 26 April 2009.

²⁸ ‘Arrival’, series 1, episode 1.

Figs 1–4. Necrology of ‘the ones we lost’, featured in the 2009 BAFTA Television Awards Ceremony.



Fig. 1.

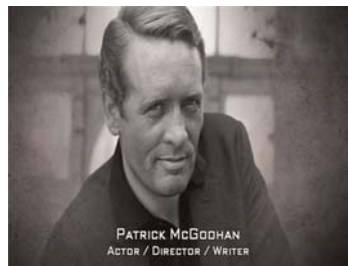


Fig. 2.

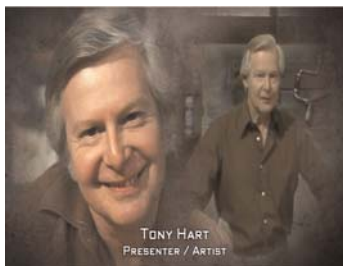


Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.

white portrait shot, overlaid with his name and occupation (‘Patrick McGoochan, actor, writer, producer’), and the rhythm of the montage begins as an accompanying music track, a piano arrangement by Ludovico Einaudi, is introduced. This opening establishes a deliberate tension between the vibrant moving television image and the still black-and-white memorial photograph of McGoochan, who correspondingly moves from being so ‘irrefutably there’ to being marked as gone. The juxtaposition of images, shift in shot-scale, use of music and selection of dialogue works to heighten the expression of loss (figures 1 and 2).

The necrology proceeds as an edited sequence of archive images, both colour and black-and-white, still and moving. Within the montage of still photographic images, certain individuals are commemorated by both a photograph and archive footage, though this time framed within a split screen and connected via a sepia-toned, stone-effect graphic which blurs the images together (figures 3 and 4).

The repetitive refrain of the piano and the oscillating movement of the rostrum camera, moving in and out of the image on almost every fade, produces a specific rhythm which distinguishes the montage sequence as a distinct and special memorial site within the programme. This is cemented by a series of reaction shots of the sombre ceremony audience before Norton resumes his role as host.

The BAFTA necrology illustrates how the fragmentation and flow of the television aesthetic may work to form an expressive whole. The treatment of the still and archive image is interesting, particularly around questions of movement. As Lury has written, the contemplative

29 Karen Lury, 'Closeup: documentary aesthetics', *Screen*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2003), p. 103.

30 Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: the Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), p. 19.

31 Describing Barthes's idea of the *punctum*, Tim Dant and Graeme Gilloch write that 'for Barthes the photograph comes alive, becomes a matter of love and passion, only when a detail or fragment interrupts, disturbs or stands out from the image . . . The *punctum* is a quality discovered by the spectator alone.' Tim Dant and Graeme Gilloch, 'Pictures of the past: Benjamin and Barthes on photography and history', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2002), p. 16.

32 Amy Holdsworth, 'Who Do You Think You Are? Family history and memory on British television', in Ann Gray and Erin Bell (eds), *Televising History: Mediating the Past in Post-war Europe* (Houndmills: Palgrave, forthcoming 2010).

opportunities of the rostrum camera 'mobilises the still photographic image so that the point of view moves around the image, "seeking out" something – though what this is, exactly, may not be entirely clear'.²⁹ This search seems to respond to the illusion of experience captured by still photography. So that, to quote Marita Sturken, 'memory appears to reside within the photographic image, to tell its story in response to our gaze'.³⁰

Whilst we are given the name and occupation of each individual, the necrology provides little other contextual information; the source of the photographs and archive footage is not marked and the images are not anchored by a narrational voiceover. Without this form of regulation we might ask what impression or memory the sequence formulates. Is it designed for the viewer, the ceremony audience or the BAFTA community? Does memory, or perhaps more specifically remembrance, act here as a visual style or mode, one designed to generate affect? The signifiatory power of the sequence is not exclusive to its content but linked to its presentation and potential affect. Here the 'seeking out' of the rostrum camera may be a way of simulating the *punctum* of photography, an attempt to mimic this subjective response.³¹

Set in motion by the necrology, the 'list' of names offers a familiar visual trope in itself, employed across a series of different forms and texts. The war memorial is probably the most familiar instance and the list becomes the basis of, for example, the commemorative documentary *The Fallen* (tx. 15 November 2008, BBC2; figure 5).

A memorial wall also appears in the final series of *ER* (NBC, 1994–2009), uncovered in the basement of the hospital, and formed out of the locker name-badges of departed key characters (figure 6). I have written elsewhere, in relation to the family history documentary *Who Do You Think You Are?* (BBC, 2004–), about how an 'iconography of memory' – graves, ruins, memorials, weeds – emerges as a problem of visually filling the empty space and absences left by history.³² In the necrology this iconography is employed through the use of a marble/stone-effect graphic, recalling a gravestone onto which the images appear.

Also significant is the self-conscious choice of archive footage, fragments of dialogue which do not necessarily reflect the iconic moments in the individual's career but are imbued with ideas of change and loss. For example, in the 2008 BAFTA television necrology, commemorating the deaths of *EastEnders* (BBC, 1985–) actress Hilda Braid and creator Tony Holland, we see Nana Moon (Hilda Braid) tell her beloved grandson Alfie (Shane Ritchie) 'Sweetheart, nothing stays the same does it?' Even the villainous Nick Cotton (John Altman), leaving prison, is poignantly reframed by the chosen dialogue: 'Hurt to leave does it Cotton?', he is asked, to which he sarcastically responds 'It's breaking my heart'. Ordinary conversation is here recontextualized to resonate in a different way. 2008 also saw the death of the actor Anton Rodgers, perhaps best known for his roles in the television sitcoms *Fresh*

Figs 5–6. The war memorial in *The Fallen* and the memorial wall in *ER*.



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.

Fields (ITV, 1984–86) and *May to December* (BBC, 1989–94); yet it is a fragment of footage from his final small-screen appearance as Ken Snell in the one-off family comedy *You Can Choose Your Friends* (ITV, 2007) that is selected. The dialogue, again, self-consciously reflects upon ideas of change and loss: ‘I am Ken Snell, King of Kings. Look upon my works, ye mighty and despair!’, which refers directly to Shelley’s famous poem ‘Ozymandias’, in which the following lines juxtapose greatness with decay:

Nothing besides remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away³³

Jason Jacobs has suggested how the pervasive presence of ‘fragments’ of television might be likened to the Romantics’ obsession with relics, ruins and decay; here this association is made explicit revealing precisely how ‘characters and their shows become ruins’.³⁴

Yet these ruins are not fixed or immobile. The montage develops a tide-like motion oscillating in and out of the selected images. Creating a back and forth movement, a rhythm which generates a feeling that reflects something specific about the relationship between past and present. The movement in this sequence enacts, perhaps, television’s ‘extraordinary ability to create the kind of experience or meaning-effect that reverberates – that moves backwards and forward in time’.³⁵ Indeed, in the images of Patrick McGoohan, in the juxtaposition of the moving image with the still photograph, the montage enacts the temporal dynamic which Barthes identifies in the photograph of a young man awaiting execution: ‘I read at the same time: *this will be* and *this has been*’.³⁶

Previously on ER (tx. 28 May 2009, More4) was a documentary made to accompany the final episode of the US medical drama series which bowed out at the end of its fifteenth season in April 2009. There were numerous ‘moments’ in the final season as the show became increasingly conscious of its own memory. For example, a secret ‘memorial wall’, in the basement of the hospital, was uncovered by the characters Abby (Maura Tierney) and Neela (Parminder Nagra) at the beginning and end

³³ Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘Ozymandias’ (1818), in Duncan Wu (ed.), *Romanticism: an Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 849.

³⁴ Jacobs, ‘Issues of judgement and value in television studies’, p. 445.

³⁵ Karen Lury ‘A response to John Corner’, *Screen*, vol. 48, no. 3 (2007), p. 373.

³⁶ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (1980) (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 96.

37 'The Book of Abby', season 15, episode 3; and 'Shifting Equilibrium', season 15, episode 20.

38 Season 15, episode 19.

39 'Heal Thyself', season 15, episode 7.

40 Jacobs, 'Issues of judgement and value in television studies', p. 438–41.

41 Ibid., p. 441.

42 Annette Kuhn, 'Memory and textuality', in Otto Heim and Caroline Wiedmer (eds), *Inventing the Past: Memory Work in Culture and History* (Basel: Schwabe, 2005), p. 19.

of the season respectively, bookmarking and emphasizing the finality of the programme's end.³⁷ There was also a series of returning characters, guesting in specific episodes; the episode 'Old Times' saw the heavily anticipated return of Dr Doug Ross (George Clooney) and nurse Carol Hathaway (Julianna Margulies).³⁸ Even deceased characters such as Dr Mark Greene (Anthony Edwards) and Dr Robert Romano (Paul McCrane) reappeared through a series of flashback sequences attached to the storyline of a new doctor Cate Banfield (Angela Bassett), who recalled her previous experience of the ER as a mother whose son is brought in and subsequently dies.³⁹

Writing about the title sequence for *ER*'s first season, Jason Jacobs considers how it works to establish the show's characteristics and style, as well as to introduce the central actors and their characters.⁴⁰ The opening sequence of *Previously on ER*, perhaps unsurprisingly, operates in a similar way, drawing on the characters and characteristics of the show. As Jacobs observes, the 'fast mobility of the continuous shot' became the 'signature style of the show',⁴¹ and this later sequence also employs a constant and steady camera movement, although moving at a slower pace as it tracks around the empty spaces of the distinctive set. The sequence opens with the sound of a siren wailing and the camera tilts down past the back of a static ambulance and then moves through the automatic doors into the waiting area. This movement is mapped against the voice of a paramedic announcing the arrival of a hit and run victim. Here the characteristic ambient sounds of the series, the clattering wheels of a gurney, the bustle of the triage area, the steady blips of a heart monitor, are connected to the spaces of the *ER* set. As the camera travels through another set of doors into the reception, the visual emptiness of the set is exaggerated by this frenetic soundtrack. The sequence proceeds as a 'montage of vignettes, anecdotes, fragments, "snapshots", flashes'⁴² – a series of flickering and still or slow-motion images of key characters from the programme that are projected onto the otherwise empty medical spaces of the ER. Windows, floors, curtains, lightboxes and the patient board are momentarily occupied by the ghosts of characters past (figure 7). The treatment of space in the sequence is reminiscent of the use of video projection and installation in the 'experiential museum' as the camera moves through a space which is designed to haunt and resonate, layering archival images and sounds and creating a form of televisual palimpsest. The very emptiness of the usually frenetic ER, and the slowing down of the programme's signature pace and camera style, emphasizes the memorial effect.

As with the BAFTA necrology, there is no guiding or narrational voiceover to the sequence but a layering of a nondiegetic, classical, mournful score with an aural archive of moments from key scenes, moments of conflict and pivotal importance for various characters. For example, former nurse Abby becomes a medical intern, former medical intern Morris (Scott Grimes) is made chief resident. Whilst the soundbites recall specific storylines, the projected images connect them

**Fig. 7. The ghosts of
*Previously on ER.***



with individual characters. Thus, although we do not see Forest Whitaker's character Curtis Ames, from a season thirteen storyline heavily involving series regular Dr Luka Kovac (Goran Visnjic), his cries are layered over the 'ghost' of Kovac: 'I want you to give me my life back – just give me my life back'. As with the selection of dialogue in the necrology, the use of dialogue tinged with feelings of loss arguably reflects the attempt to emulate or generate the feelings of loss for the viewer who has spent fifteen years watching the programme. The sequence concludes as the camera tracks back out of the trauma room and the lights above the table bleach out the scene. As the mournful strings of the soundtrack die away, the voice of Dr Morgenstern (William H. Macy), chief of the ER in season one, is heard. Specifically, it is a fragment of dialogue from the closing scene of the pilot episode of the series, as Morgenstern mentors the young attending physician Mark Greene: 'The unit's looking to you Mark. You set the tone.' A piece of advice, a 'torch' to be handed down throughout the series, this fragment of dialogue is later passed along in farewell episodes from Greene to Carter (Noah Wyle) and from Carter to Morris.⁴³

Annette Kuhn writes how the organization of time in the memory text is cyclical rather than sequential.⁴⁴ In the example above we can see how television offers both the cycle and the sequence in its seasonal character and its relationship to routine and ritual. In addition, if we think of the television viewing experience as one of accumulation, where viewing experiences and references are built up over time to form a kind of television autobiography, we may also return to the idea of television as process.⁴⁵ What the sequence from *Previously on ER* therefore attempts to capture and reproduce are those 'afterimages' and 'moments' built up over a life lived across television; to create, to paraphrase Kuhn, a sense of what remembering *television* feels like.

Of interest here – and *ER* appears to be particularly conscious of this – are the forms and functions of repetition, notably in the use of

⁴³ 'Orion in the Sky', season 8, episode 18; and 'The Show Must Go On', season 11, episode 22.

⁴⁴ Kuhn, 'Memory and textuality', p. 20.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Tim O'Sullivan, 'Nostalgia, revelation and intimacy: tendencies in the flow of modern popular television', in Christine Geraghty and David Lusted (eds), *The Television Studies Book* (London: Arnold, 1998), pp. 198–209.

television's own archival material. Here Barbara Klinger's work on the pleasures of repetition for film viewing prove illuminating. Categorizing these pleasures as familiarity, aesthetic appreciation, therapy and nostalgia, she writes of the last category that

As nostalgia involves an interplay between film narrative and the viewer's past, it ignites a chain of autobiographical associations, deeply affecting the process of comprehension . . . comprehension is not, then, simply the act of understanding the flow of narrative events or the stories' main theme. It lies, rather, in the connections set off while a text is being read or viewed. Repeated encounters with the same films over time amplify associative possibilities.⁴⁶

If, following Dant and Gilloch's discussion of the *punctum* we understand this as 'not a quality of the photograph itself so much as a product of the Spectator's engagement with it', here it is the *viewer* who sets the tone.⁴⁷

These associative possibilities seem particularly pertinent when considering serial drama, in which cumulative narratives demand and reward certain levels of audience investment in character and diegesis, often over hundreds of hours of programming.⁴⁸ Whilst memory in these examples might be viewed as a basic imperative of televisual forms of storytelling, their significance is explicitly revealed through reflective moments which, as with the examples from *ER*, often occur in anniversary episodes or moments of character/narrative upheaval or closure. In such instances, memories of television are written into serial narratives through practices of self-citation and self-referentiality. Operating as a reflective device for character, narrative and audience, these moments in the life of a programme reveal how television *is* meaningful in many instances because of the way that it interacts with memory.⁴⁹ Such instances can illuminate the qualities of serial television⁵⁰ but also provide a commentary on the comparative function of television memory and nostalgia.

Across my analysis of the examples employed in this essay, I have commented on the rhymes, patternings, rhythms and repetitions within the individual texts, and considered how they work to amplify existing, or to generate new, associations and resonances. It is in the structure of these examples that television is aligned with the structure of the memory text, a memory text which, as Kuhn herself observes, is also akin to poetry.⁵¹ Within this alignment, what emerges is how these moments of intensity within the flow of television function in a similar way to the relationship between words, meaning and experience in poetry. Terry Eagleton has written that

Poetry is a kind of phenomenology of language – one in which the relationship between word and meaning (or signifier and signified) is tighter than it is in everyday speech . . . Poetry is language in which the

⁴⁶ Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies and the Home* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), p. 177.

⁴⁷ Dant and Gilloch, 'Pictures of the past', p. 16.

⁴⁸ See Jeffrey Sconce, 'What if? Charting television's new textual boundaries', in Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (eds), *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 93–111.

⁴⁹ See Lury, *British Youth Television*, p. 133.

⁵⁰ As Glen Creeber has argued, 'intimacy' and 'continuity' are the 'twin characteristics' of serial television. See his article "'Taking our personal lives seriously": intimacy, continuity and memory in the television drama serial', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2001), p. 453.

⁵¹ 'Memory texts are metaphorical rather than analogical: as such, they have more in common with poetry than with classical narrative'. Kuhn, 'Memory and textuality', p. 19.

52 Terry Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 21 (italics in original).

signified or meaning is *the whole process of signification itself*. It is thus always at some level language which is about itself. There is something circular or self-referential about even the most publicly engaged of poems . . . Poetry is something which is done to us, not just said to us. The meaning of the words is closely bound up with the experience of them.⁵²

In this sense these moments of televisual memory function as televisual poems – in the use of montage and the framing of the sequences, the tension between, and rhythm produced by, stillness and movement, and the repetition of the archive, they are circular and self-referential. As moments of ebb they reflect backwards on the flow of television and in their evocative play with the relationships between part and whole can be considered as expressive of the pattern of television itself. They illuminate the role of memory in understanding how television works but they are also fragments which attempt to capture and magnify an experience of television. Like Eagleton's description of poetry, these moments of televisual memory reveal a complex relationship between feeling and understanding, where meaning is closely bound up both with the experience of the sequence itself and with the greater flow of television.

Abderrahmane Sissako and the poetics of engaged expatriation

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Recent developments in contemporary global cinema highlight a fascinating trend, namely the manner in which the contingencies of production, such as the filmmaker's location, sources of funding and available modes of distribution, determine the character of a film. In the case of the Malian/Mauritanian filmmaker Abderrahmane Sissako, who lives mainly in Paris, this trend is so noticeable that it can be said to constitute the form of his work. This claim – that the logistical process of juggling the demands of the institutions providing funds with the demands of filming a complex reality in a particular African setting can shape a film – is central to my argument in this essay. Sissako's location in France would be a simple biographical detail but for the fact that from this base he produces works that constantly draw attention to the problems associated with place – or with home, to use a more contentious expression from the point of view of an expatriated artist.

In this essay, I provide a detailed exploration of two of Sissako's films, *Rostov-Luanda* (1997) and *Life on Earth* (1999), in relation to certain issues that appear to be significant in his increasingly visible intellectual and artistic career. *Rostov-Luanda* is an account of Sissako's search in Luanda, the Angolan capital, for a man he used to know as a fellow student in communist Russia. *Life on Earth*, perhaps his best-known film, was commissioned in France as part of the millennium celebrations, and chronicles everyday life in Sokolo, the filmmaker's village in Mali, on the eve of the new millennium. Prior to making these two films, Sissako, trained in the former Soviet Union in the early 1980s, made a number of award-winning short films, including *Le Jeu* (1989), *October/Octobre* (1993), *Le Chameau et les Batons Flottants* (1994), and the mid-length

- 1 Michael Sicinski 'A fragmented epistemology: the films of Abderrahmane Sissako', *Cinema Scope*, no. 29, <http://www.cinema-scope.com/cs29/feat_sicinski_sissako.html> [accessed 17 March 2010].
- 2 Isabel Balseiro, 'Exile and longing in Abderrahmane Sissako's *La vie sur terre*', *Screen*, vol. 48, no. 4 (2007), pp. 443–61.
- 3 Emile Fallaux, 'A cine nomad in Paris: interview with Abderrahmane Sissako', *Nka*, no. 19 (2004), p. 58.
- 4 Jude Akudonobi, 'Reco(r)ding reality: representation and paradigms in nonfiction African cinema', *Social Identities*, vol. 6, no. 3 (2000), p. 356.
- 5 The release coincided with the 2007 Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO), in Burkina Faso, during which one of the film's stars, and coproducer, Danny Glover was interviewed on the independent radio programme Democracy Now! See Danny Glover on the Oscars and the Panafrican Film and Television Festival in Burkina Faso', 26 February 2007, <http://www.democracynow.org/2007/2/26/danny_glover_on_the_oscars_and> [accessed 17 March 2010]. There is also the less coincidental fact of the title, resonating with the Bamako Appeal, the anti-globalization document developed by the Polycentric World Social Forum in the Malian capital in January 2006.

Sabriya (1997). Since 2000, he has released two films – *Waiting for Happiness* (2002) and *Bamako* (2007) – which show his exceptional directorial skills and confirm his position among the more prized and praised of contemporary African filmmakers. Until he made *Bamako*, Sissako's films tended to avoid the kinds of explicit didacticism and conventional narrative predominate in African cinema in favour of subtle, light-touch meditations on themes with contemporary resonance: identity, displacement, difference and social inequality. However, as this essay proposes, this is not to say that his earlier work is apolitical.

In spite of their different histories, the two films under discussion here both draw attention to Sissako's attitude towards form in a decisive way. Those aspects of his work that have led critics to identify 'a fragmented epistemology',¹ 'exile and longing',² 'the cinema of trust'³ or 'a rhetoric of reflexivity'⁴ cannot be productively grasped without reference to broader questions of expatriation, intellectualism and genre. Sissako's decision to film African realities from the standpoint of a returning expatriate, and in formally inventive and conceptual ways, represents an appropriate point of entry into a cinematic world at once simple and complex. It is the central purpose of this essay to explore the intricacies of these categories – expatriation, intellectualism and genre – within the institution of contemporary cinema.

The release in early 2007 of *Bamako*, Sissako's remorseless and stylishly Brechtian look at the impact of the economic programmes of the World Bank on poor countries, rode on the wave of global resentment towards, and agitation against, the institutions of neoliberal capitalism. This reception of the film has possibly encouraged a perception of Sissako as a new thorn in the side of corporate capital.⁵ Whilst acknowledging *Bamako* as a critique of uneven geographical development, I propose that the film is more productively seen as integral to Sissako's emerging aesthetic of an engaged and probing expatriation. In their juxtaposition of personal and professional mobility with economic or psychological destitution that is at once particular and global, the two films discussed here show the development of this aesthetic.

Questions of expatriation, intellectualism and genre pertain to Sissako's work in interesting ways. Given the overtly poetic tone of most of his films and the paradox of a characteristically slow pacing in the films which deal directly with questions of movement (mobility), it is not an exaggeration to describe this filmmaker as a poet at heart and a nomad at home. If definite identities are implicit in this description, it is also the case that these identities are at odds with each other, for to be a poet at heart implies that poetry influences the composition of the films, and to be a nomad at home implies that places are as stable as one makes them. If a synthesis of coherent identity is at all possible from these layered alienations, it might be the discovery of an idea, or an ideal, out of the fragments, with the recognition that each is a piece of work-in-progress. Emile Fallaux confronts the problem thus:

The subject of identity is tricky territory, especially for a displaced person, as Sissako sees himself. He does not like being reduced to an identity from a geographically defined culture. He's a man of many places and cultures. How African can one be after ten years in Moscow and another ten in Paris? And what does it mean, being African when in your youth you were a Mauritanian outsider in Mali and not speaking your mother tongue in Mauritania?⁶

⁶ Fallaux, 'A cine nomad in Paris', p. 59.

This is a tendentious proposition, but its bias is mitigated by its questioning premiss. Since the quote is likely to convey the impression that 'being African' is the tricky part, I should add that Fallaux notes earlier that the filmmaker's European residence is no less problematic, for Paris is 'still a place from which to organize departure to finance films, to return to for postproduction'.⁷ It is not the appropriate location for the kind of stories Sissako wishes to film. The challenge that this poses to the artist is everywhere on display in the films of Sissako, and it is the reason that I will conceptualize the relation of his work to place in terms of expatriation, intellectualism and genre. It is also significant that there is a genealogical basis for this intellectual position, one for which the figure of Aimé Césaire is an inspiration. In *Texaco*, the magnificent ode to creolization by the Martinican novelist Patrick Chamoiseau, there is a passage of great beauty and sadness in which the narrator, Marie-Sophie Laborieux, describes a meeting with Césaire and recalls the philosopher of negritude as wearing the expression of 'a poet whose peoples are yet to be born'.⁸ The simultaneity of hope and despair that the statement suggests is fitting, and not merely because the figure of Césaire is a paradigmatic example of anticolonialism. As readers of *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* may remember, among the poem's many surprises is the poet persona's vow to be the voice for 'those miseries which have no tongue'.⁹ The importance of this resonant phrase in the context of Martinique and in the larger history of anticolonialism cannot be overstated, for it draws attention to the fact that nationalism was still incipient on the island and that the people of Martinique existed as a country only notionally.

⁷ Ibid., p. 57.

⁸ Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*, trans. Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokurov (New York: Vintage, 1997), p. 355.

⁹ Aimé Césaire, *Return to my Native Land*, trans. Emile Snyders (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1960), p. 43.

Although there is a great distance between the inspirational grandeur of Césaire's declaration and the reality of serving as mayor of Fort-de-France (the context of his fictional meeting with Marie-Sophie and her neighbours), the aesthetic force of Césaire's anticolonial writing has remained a powerful and attractive inspiration for artists eager to speak to new situations where hope and despair coexist in unequal measure. In Sissako's films, the resonance of the negritude poet's rhetoric of anticolonialism is basically of an aesthetic order, in that the primary attraction of the rhetoric lies in its trenchant modulation of a critique of historical inequalities. However, the context of Sissako's personal encounter with its force means that the construction of this aesthetic order sits uneasily with that of expatriation and is deployed in the films in both subtle and overt ways.

One way in which it is possible to discern the aesthetic resonance between Sissako and Césaire is to explore the relationships between the categories of expatriation, intellectualism and genre, and the nature of the institutional form through which they can be apprehended. A serious artistic undertaking in an expatriated (or diasporic) context becomes implicitly intellectualist because the nature of the audience for an artist working away from home is such that the form of address in a given work is conceptual, as the artist seeks different ways of conveying not just the predicament of expatriation but the demands of reaching an audience who can longer be simply imagined or addressed. ‘Conceptual’ in this sense means that conditions such as displacement, exile, expatriation and migration are so complex that any attempt to represent them often relies on a self-conscious use of form.¹⁰ In cinema, where the primary language is visual, the conventions of mimetic narrative and progressive sense of time are inadequate in dealing with such issues. These demands are further complicated if the artist’s material is demonstrably about social or economic issues, as is the case with Sissako, and involves the personal investment of the artist, in terms of appearing as a character in his own work. This begs the following questions: what is it about overwhelming social inequalities and works of art that causes them to exist in tandem; how does the critic approach unique artistic creations that are simultaneously governed by generic and institutional rules without which neither the artist, nor the work, is capable of enunciation; is there any validity to this premiss, or to its antithesis, namely that the logic of the work and its maker’s relation to it may be to change both genre and institution? Keeping these in mind, I shall briefly identify certain features of Sissako’s aesthetic in order to understand better the importance of institutions in the production of contemporary films.

Sissako has been concerned in his films to fashion a narrative style that bears the signature of a distinctive artistic temperament; this means that certain recurrent patterns are discernible in his work. More often than not, for example, he appears in his own films as a character called Dramane (from Abderrahmane), although he has described his inclusion in *Rostov-Luanda* in an interview as a ‘casting mistake’.¹¹ But even if this were the case, there is ample evidence that his essayistic self-presentation brings into focus more than the contingencies of production, given the explicit manner in which the persona of Césaire speaks to the destitution of Sokolo via the contemplative voice of Dramane in *Life on Earth*. According to Akudinobi, the film’s mode of address, which is ‘matter-of-fact’, is also ‘crucial to re-examining how Africa[n] cinema engages forms of representation and African cultural spaces’.¹² This highlights the reflexivity and the conceptualism of Sissako’s style, influenced by a tradition of artistic engagement both within Africa and in relation to cinema itself. From this reflexive position Sissako engages in dialogue with the other characters; it is these dialogues, as well as his extended meditations or ‘internal monologues’, which make up the diegetic template on which the plot, such as it is, is mapped. These

10 My use of the term ‘conceptual’ precedes my encounter with Isabel Balseiro’s use of it, and I have retained it here to underscore the intellectual bent of Sissako’s work and to suggest its relationship to certain currents in postcolonial cultural production, for example the ‘analytical orientation’ which Okwui Enwezor identifies in contemporary photography. See Okwui Enwezor, ‘Snap judgments: new positions in contemporary African photography’, in *Snap Judgment* (New York, NY: International Center for Photography, 2006), p. 25.

11 Kwame Anthony Appiah, ‘A screenplay is not a guarantee: interview with Abderrahmane Sissako’, in Mahen Bonetti and Prerana Reddy (eds), *Through African Eyes: Dialogues with the Directors* (New York, NY: African Film Festival, 2003), p. 41.

12 Akudinobi, ‘Reco(r)ding reality’, p. 357.

dialogues and/or monologues are formally close to the narration in conventional documentary cinema. Perhaps it is this hybridity of form that explains Akudinobi's classification of *Life on Earth* as a documentary, whereas Sicinski suggests that it is 'Sissako's first fictional feature'.¹³

In film after film Sissako uses open space as a natural setting, and the combination of multiple tracking shots with the thematic motif of a quest suggests that 'the road' and modes of transportation (motorcars in *Rostov-Luanda*, bicycles and donkey-carts in *Life on Earth*) are at the centre of each narrative. There is much to be said about this feature of Sissako's work in relation to the visual appearance of Sahelian West Africa and the vexed question of 'ethnographic' filming of the region, and about the association of long shots with 'exotica'. However, in Sissako's films the open desert or a despoiled landscape is not only inhabited, it also draws attention to itself through motion and quest. This feature is particularly noticeable in *Waiting for Happiness* (2002), in which, as if to further foreclose the possibility of an ethnographic analysis of his images, Sissako makes extensive use of closeup shots, as, for instance, when the face of a girl reciting to music occupies half of the screen.

Another key feature of Sissako's style is the centrality of introspection or meditation as an aspect of the quest itself. This tends to give each film a slow, deliberate pace, which, with the filmmaker's characteristic lightness of touch, helps to establish a contemplative ambience. This meditative style is juxtaposed with situational drama, building mini-climaxes out of either premeditated encounters or logical outcomes of the quest. The emphasis on these features varies from one film to another. The 'I'-narration in *Rostov-Luanda*, for example, is more recurrent and more unified than the voiceover in *Life on Earth*, which splices verses and passages from the writings of Césaire with dictations from the supposed letter of a family head to his nephew in Paris. But this signifies not so much a qualitative difference in the relationship between the narrator and the challenge posed by the objects of the narrations, as the specificity of the moment which attracts the narration. In other words, the difference between the voiceover reading Césaire's verses out loud and the one musing over a friend's whereabouts results from their respective objectives.

What is most exceptional about Sissako's work is the question of form, and how this comes across to the viewer as a preoccupation with the problematic question of genre in African filmmaking. Genre is key, especially since the two films discussed here result from commissions, with all the attendant issues of formatting, whether these pertain to film festivals or television programming. The situation of African and contemporary filmmaking in expatriate discursive contexts is often determined by the requirements of Western European and North American funding, patronage, and exhibition or distribution. This

specific production context is primarily responsible for the importance that has been attached to form. It continues to be important, and in fact more and more films continue to be made within these production strictures, and directors are intimately caught up in this process of commissioning. It is noteworthy that Fallaux, in his encounter with Sissako, was not simply a journalist looking to interview a newsmaker; he was a board member of Hubert Bals Fund in Amsterdam, to which the director intended to apply for a postproduction grant at the time of their encounter. It is also significant that Fallaux approaches the question of Sissako's location in terms of production factors, concentrating on the base from which 'to finance films', and the place to which the filmmaker returns 'for postproduction'. I shall return to this point in the conclusion.¹⁴

When these institutional demands are met in the representational context of overwhelming inequality at the beginning of the second millennium – the thematic focus of *Life on Earth* – there is more at stake than a choice of two identities. It is not just that being African and an artist or having a base in Paris is problematic; it is also that the work emerging out of such contradictory (or complementary) positions bears the mark of multiple negotiations. There is a pertinent relationship between these two issues and the way that the expatriated artist–intellectual has to grapple with them, even when she/he is working in a site which is supposedly impervious to such forces. That relationship often obliges or encourages these artists to adopt the conceptual approach in the production of works of art. In the process of working through this conceptual mode, an expatriated filmmaker develops what the film scholar Hamid Naficy suggestively calls 'a performance of the author's identity',¹⁵ although his argument that this comes with 'interstitial and collective modes of production' requires further specification before it can hold validity for African filmmakers. This is because African filmmakers often have to subject their sense of the collective to the strictures of funding agencies such as France's once-influential Ministry of Cooperation. In the films *Life on Earth* and *Rostov-Luanda*, Sissako's conceptual approach straddles the subtle border between poetics and politics.

Rostov-Luanda is often described as a feature film, but according to the filmmaker it is a work which, in a formal sense, paves the way for the filming of *Life on Earth*.¹⁶ The film narrates Sissako's search in war-weary Angola for Afonso Baribanga, a former colleague whom he had known while studying in the then Soviet Union. Sissako spent this formative time in the USSR learning filmmaking at the Institute for Cinema (VGIK) in Moscow. His training repeats an important episode in the then-communist country's cultural-educational patronage of 'third world' countries in the context of the Cold War. The careers of Ousmane Sembène and Souleymane Cissé also bear witness to this rich history of aesthetic vanguardism.¹⁷ Angola, like Benin, Mali, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, has played a significant role in this history in

14 Perhaps these questions are most complexly present in the work of the Bissauan filmmaker, Flora Gomes, who comes from a country that cannot realistically support film production but who has produced extremely important works through cooperation with funders in France, Portugal and Germany. For a recent discussion of this production context in relation to francophone African films, see Teresa Hoefert de Turégano, *African Cinema and Europe: Close-up on Burkina Faso* (Florence: European Press Academic Publishing, 2004), especially ch. 2.

15 Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 6.

16 Appiah, 'A screenplay is not a guarantee', pp. 40–41.

17 Mark Nash, 'The modernity of African cinema', in Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in African, 1945–1994*, (Munich: Prestel, 2001), p. 343; David Murphy, *Sembène: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction* (Oxford and Trenton, NJ: James Currey and Africa World Press, 2000), p. 69, fn. 7.

terms of political alignment. A lapse of seventeen years separates the friendship formed in Rostov from the unraveling of the hopes of socialist internationalism in the early 1990s, and all that the former student retains of this friendship is a group photograph in black-and-white, showing him and Baribanga with other foreign students, including their Russian language teacher, Natalia Lvovna. The juxtaposition of styles in *Rostov-Luanda* – cinema verité, conventional documentary interviews, the ‘fictional’ interplay of events, histories, biographies and encounters, improvised performances – suggests a conceptual arrangement that is formally necessary, due to the political context of the war in Angola as well as the tangled history of economic relations between the continent and the USSR.

Sissako’s relationship to the subject of his film may be understood as a kind of groping in a vast field of emotions and questions, set within the grand illusion of personal and political freedom that made his initial meeting with his friend in Rostov possible. Sissako makes this personal dimension explicit in the opening shots of the film, which place him in Kiffa, his family home in Mauritania. This sequence constitutes a mere tenth of the entire quest, yet it brings the director (as Dramane) into the narrative and foregrounds the patient, searching pace of the film and its structure as an adventure. This opening sequence is complemented by a similar episode at the end of the film, with the search forming an arc between the two. The brief prelude filmed in Kiffa unfolds within the tight-knit familial context that is in contrast to the uncertain search in Luanda and other sites in Angola, and to which the filmmaker returns as a more grounded location in *Waiting for Happiness*. Sissako here positions himself in the role of spectator, present but silent as his uncle narrates the nephew’s decision to travel to Angola to Tonéle, the old nanny:

I asked him: ‘Why go to Angola with all the risks involved and lose your money?’ He said to me: ‘Cousin, that [the risk of traveling in a country at war] is true, but this is also true: man is born to travel, to suffer, to meet people, to learn habits, to learn customs. I’m going to Angola, simply to live my adventure and be an adventurer.’ (*Rostov-Luanda*)

Sissako/Dramane remains a spectator even during the performance staged by his extended family, a paradoxical attitude meaningfully critiqued in the statement that ‘since his departure [for] Moscow, Dramane has only returned carrying a camera, as an observer’.¹⁸

Sissako’s wandering camera encounters people whose daily experiences revolve around searching for relatives. In a film that journeys through the devastation and the destitution of a series of wars, it is easy to idealize ordinary people and the quirks of their everyday lives. But the strength of *Rostov-Luanda* lies in both the profound insights of these ordinary people that the filmmaker encounters in his search for Baribanga, and in the seeming coincidence of these encounters, despite the fact that Sissako has disclosed that he made an exploratory visit to Angola ‘and met

¹⁸ Fallaux, ‘A cine nomad in Paris’, p. 59.

19 Appiah, 'A screenplay is not a guarantee', p. 40.

20 There are probably hundreds of scholarly accounts of the Angolan war, but a succinct history with a focus on the series of four 'wars' (1961, 1975, 1980s, 1997) exists in David Birmingham, 'Angola', in Patrick Chabal with David Birmingham, Joshua Forrest, Malyn Newitt, Gerhard Siebert and Elisa Silva Andrade, *A History of Postcolonial Lusophone Africa* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 137–84.

practically all the people who would later be in the film'.¹⁹ Baribanga himself does not make an appearance until the last two minutes of the film. We see his face in the picture that Sissako holds up, and the filmmaker's introspective meditations periodically dwell on him. However, in Luanda, Huambo and Humpata, the people who are asked to identify this man say they do not know him, and go on to discuss the wars. The film becomes a serendipitous opportunity for ordinary people to talk about the effects of war: the physical and psychological devastation that cannot be ignored in Angola in the late 1990s.

Yet it is obvious from the form of *Rostov-Luanda* that it cannot discuss the complex issues of the wars as the viewer might wish. Primarily concerned with the search for Baribanga, the time it devotes to the question of the war is unavoidably limited. It is worth noting that although people talk about the war as a singular phenomenon – *a guerra* – Angola suffered four wars between 1961 and 2002, and while this is perhaps a period of recession in the last of the wars, people seem to talk of nothing else.²⁰ In addition, Sissako is an outsider in this country, despite the claims of a Pan-African ideal that partially motivate his identification with Baribanga's home country. His artistic involvement in the war is thus a political choice. Motivated as much by local, regional and international border-watching as by basic control over mineral resources, the Angolan war was very complex. At different periods five other countries were involved – the USA, the former Soviet Union, Cuba, South Africa and Portugal – and there were three primary parties to the conflict within Angola, not counting the minor factions. To engage fully with this complexity would require a very different kind of film in terms of length, design and tone. Indeed there are films – Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga* (1972) and Flora Gomes's *Mortu Nega* (1988), among others – that deal with aspects of the liberation wars in African countries under Portuguese colonialism, and their engagement with specific histories strikes an aesthetic chord that contrasts with the introspective quest of *Rostov-Luanda*. A more pertinent comparison is *The Hollow City* (Maria João Ganga, 2004), in which the intertextual dramatization of passages from Pepetela's 1976 classic book *The Adventures of Ngunga* in a school theatre project orchestrates a reflexive voice and tone that is much closer to Sissako/Dramane's.

It is this introspection on the part of the filmmaker, presented as a series of meditations on the viability of the search for Baribanga, which establishes the film as a poetic excursion rather than as a documentary. Together with the actual visit to Luanda and the subsequent travels in other Angolan cities, these overheard meditations reveal Sissako's undertaking to be a complex process of discovery and self-discovery. Looking for Baribanga in Angola comes with risks, and these risks reflect his own illusions and preconceptions about, first, the nature of friendship and, second, the fundamental link between the dream of freedom that turned African countries into clients of the Soviet Union and the impact of that relationship on the political upheavals in Angola. There are at

least six of these meditations, but two of them will serve to illustrate my point here:

On my search for Baribanga, I started by getting lost in the world which was once his and which saw him grow up. Gathering fragments here and there to try to compose his image. Getting lost in the rumours of the city, complying to (sic) no one's sensations, before abandoning one's entire self to haphazard distances and routes. (*Rostov-Luanda*)

This reflection draws attention to the haphazard nature of the filming process, which involves 'getting lost' and 'gathering fragments', although there are hints to remind the attentive listener that everyone in that film had been approached prior to the filming. It is also obvious from this statement that the travels to the hinterlands arise logically from the unsuccessful search in Angola, a place so fragmented and scarred that looking for Baribanga is like following a mirage. The second meditation occurs after his return from the hinterlands, where his quest has established a profound congruity between the filmmaker and the war-scarred population, for whom looking for a lost relative is a routine experience:

Back to Luanda, hope has become a familiar feeling again. That hope that the two of us shared along with many Africans of my generation. The memory of Baribanga is getting blurred. Not that I'm forgetting him. But his features are drawing new faces, which my search leads me to. Such are the features of a friend. (*Rostov-Luanda*)

The implications of these meditations are perhaps self-evident in terms of the argument made so far, but there is still space for elaboration. The people interviewed before the first statement are city people for whom war is not necessarily a distant memory simply because hostilities have abated. They occupy different social positions: a female former military cadre, a 'retired' bar attendant, a war orphan and a city lady in the mood for a drink; the first woman to be interviewed (the only other person besides Dramane's uncle to speak in French in the film) was a freedom fighter in her youth. What they have in common is their place in the city and their potential as leads in the search for Baribanga, who as a Soviet-trained African could plausibly have found his own station in their ranks. Thus, multiple personal reflections on the war, whether oblique or direct, establish a pattern through which Dramane contemplates the implications of a missed opportunity: the country which sent Baribanga to Moscow is crippled by war, while the skills supposedly acquired during training remain untapped because the man lives in exile. This explains the poeticized nature of Dramane's reflections, the rhetorical self-questioning by an intellectual who contemplates the reality of a war-scarred country while imagining the international encounter in the USSR as part of an attempt to forestall the tragedy of the war.

Poetry as a specific mode of narration informs these meditations, especially upon Dramane's return from the countryside. With hope of an

actual encounter with Baribanga in Angola dashed, emotions and expectations manifest in another register, and we hear the anguish of disappointment and loss in the strained syntax of the musings that attain a poetic completeness and passion impossible in the quotidian undertaking of seeking a long-lost friend. There is a recurrent interplay between the ordinary and the dramatic, between the mundane and the spectacular. Although his travels in smaller towns like Huambo, Humpata and Lubango do reveal personal stories and perspectives that a conventional cinematic narrative of the war may obscure, we are equally drawn to the visual effect of the travels. The rich, recurrent overlay of tracking shots, the view of the countryside from the shoulders of João Eurico the driver, and the travelling views of the market in Humpata are justification enough for the visits. This visual spectacle, the enchantment with the landscape, is the logic of the declaration which Dramane makes about the urgency of adventure.

The use of tracking shots as a cinematic device complements the director's reliance on poetry in his work to address the ambivalence of the intellectual position he occupies. The nomadic impulse which drives these excursions constitutes an important aspect of the aesthetic that recurs elsewhere in Sissako's films. It is these choices that enable us to view his work within the intellectual and institutional context broadly described at the beginning of this essay. The subject of the film calls for this kind of self-conscious positioning of the filmmaker as an exile and a poet who is reflecting on the experience of looking in vain for a friend. In this regard, the director's move from metropolitan France to the war-zone of Angola – mediated through the prologue in Kiffa – is integral to the film, confirmed by the fact that when Baribanga does eventually turn up, it is in another setting of expatriation. Here is Dramane again, just before he meets his old friend:

Baribanga lives in Germany, but not for much longer. It is his last exile before returning to his homeland. On this October morning I heard him pronounce in the language we learnt together – in the name of old illusions – the word 'return' just like accomplishment. (*Rostov-Luanda*)

We could see Baribanga's hope of return as one that seems available to Dramane as well. Indeed, the possibilities and dangers of return are what Sissako's work suggests on an imaginative level, fraught as it is with aesthetic and/or ethical booby-traps. The 'old illusions' may have now become slogans uttered in the distance of expatriation or in the course of a conversation on an autumnal morning, but they also draw attention to another thing the friends share: the similarity of two landscapes. When Dramane, leaving Kiffa, says, 'before dawn I took to the road', he is talking about the beginning of his visit to Angola, whose landscape is the basis for an engagement with the paradoxical absence of Baribanga from a country with which he is so identified. But there is an obvious similarity between this move from the comfort of family in Mauritania to Angola

and from the Parisian supermarket to Sokolo in *Life on Earth*. The relative comfort of Kiffa parallels the comfort in Paris preparatory to the encounter with Sokolo in the second film, and allows the viewer to relate the ecological and economic destitutions of the Malian town to the despoliation through war of the Angolan cityscape and countryside. When the camera returns home, it is this fraught terrain that compels the filmmaker's attention in the film that imagines life in Sokolo (a village very much like Kiffa) during the last hours of the twentieth century.

Commissioned as part of an international series developed in France, *2000 Vue Par.../2000 As Seen By...*, whose purpose was 'to depict, in fiction, the moment of transition to the year 2000', *La Vie sur terre/Life on Earth* conveys the sense of an extraordinary specificity both numbing and engaging, at a time when 'the rest of the world' is hurtling into the twenty-first century in the grip of an equally extraordinary technological and social transformation. It is concerned with self-exploration, an idea suggested by the film's juxtaposition of two personal voices – a returning son's letter to his father in the village, and a destitute family head's letter to his brother in (what may be) a European capital. Interwoven with these letters are Césaire's poetic meditations in his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. The verses constitute a philosophical frame for the ethical and political questions raised by the film's commitment to a specific place, while the voices in the letters act as a counterpoint and grapple with the problems of everyday life. Between these two forms of rhetoric lies the messy reality of Sokolo.

Life on Earth is a fragmentary film but it is not without a centre. While it is complex, embodying competing or complementary stories, there is a subtle, overall pattern and each of the narratives is justified as part of everyday life in Sokolo. Césaire's text sets the tone of the film's precarious balance between a direct involvement in the Sokolo and the contrasting urge to merely observe it, for fear of being overwhelmed:

Leave / My heart was bursting with fire and ardor / Leave / I'll arrive
fresh and young / In my country / and tell this country whose dust has
penetrated my flesh. I wandered for a long time / I now return to your
hideous open wounds / As I arrive, I'll say to myself: 'Beware my
body, my soul / Don't fold your arms / In the sterile stance of a
spectator / For life is not a spectacle / For a screaming man is not a
dancing bear ...'

Solemn as it sounds, this declaration embodies the urge of one of the film's characters (Dramane himself) to try and articulate what he has lost or gained:

Despite the message I had Jiddou give, a change in me makes me want
to come home to Sokolo. The desire to film Sokolo, the desire to leave,
as Aimé Césaire said. Especially as it is nearly the year 2000, which
I'm sure will bring no improvements. As you must well know. Is what

I learn far from you worth what I forget about us? Jiddou told me on the telephone that the birds are gone. This is good news. (*Life on Earth*)

But the birds are not gone. The scourge of quelea birds, the pests of the rice field, is one of the central issues in the film. The wealth of goods pictured in the Parisian supermarket is contrasted via a jump cut to a shot of a withered tree announcing a drought which might soon create famine in Sokolo. Sissako does not concentrate on Paris, and later in the film Europe and its material self-sufficiency will be represented through radio announcements concerning Paris's obsessive interest in the end-of-the-millennium celebrations. Sokolo and its wants are Sissako's main concern, because he is primarily attracted to Sokolo's destitution; this point is important to my argument and it informs my view of Isabel Balseiro's reading of the film as a work dealing with 'exile and longing', discussed at greater length below. For it is not as if the destitution in Sokolo is merely waiting for the director's camera, as if the poetic and wandering filmmaker is the voice the village needs to hymn its wreck. The filming is made possible partly because, however run-down and arduous, the different artisanal and semi-professional occupations have a certain rationality and keep pace with the village's rhythm, through which it exhibits its awareness of its relationships with 'the rest of the world'.

Sissako manages this first through the concurrence of incidents in the film. At the moment that Radio France International's announcement of the dawning of 1 January 2000 reaches Sokolo, we see a postman trying to assist a customer who wants to reach G-Point, an army base probably located within the country. Nana Baby, the visiting young woman with whom Dramane has struck up a friendship, is posing at the photographer's. Someone calls in from France, and the radio simultaneously plays Ryako Suketomo in Tokyo, who speaks directly to and with Paris. Secondly, the snip-snip sound of the scissors of the barber – who stands next to the mirror on which is reflected the image of a man from across the street also posing for a photograph – flows into the photographer's gestures as he waits for an appropriate moment, as if the sound of the scissors were that of a clock ticking, cueing the click of the shutter. All this suggests that precision matters to the residents of Sokolo, in spite of the apparently atemporal context in which they conduct most of their business. Thirdly, familiarity with a certain rhythm of life is apparent in the very business of the Voice of the Rice Fields, the ramshackle FM station that puts the overheard passages from *Discourse on Colonialism* on the air, indicating the possibility of a populist, politically-aware consensus. This is despite the absence of educational infrastructure and the impossibility of total commitment from the announcer, who divides his time between the studio, repairing radios and chasing birds off the rice fields.

Thus on the level of sound (that is, through the radio), residents of Sokolo are able to cue into the celebration in real time. Each millennial

celebration is seen to have been experienced in close to coeval time, and this is what makes for such a powerful disjunction between the suggestion in Paris of a global New Year holiday and people elsewhere fighting pests for control of their rice fields. While people in places such as Sokolo do not totally control the media and the forces within which they work, neither are they totally controlled by them. What is at stake, as one can see in those parts of the film in which residents of Sokolo are working with both analogical and mechanical media, is the kind of sociocultural negotiation with materials that theorists of globalization have identified as crucial to survival in situations in which global flows must be related to local contexts.

Another example of this negotiation occurs when Nana Baby goes to the post office to make a telephone call. After several unsuccessful attempts, she is invited to consider some alternative calling options under what the operator describes as 'cross-transferring', namely the 'repetition of part, or all of [a] message'. There are apparently three kinds of cross-transferring. These are total, compulsory cross-transferring, partial compulsory cross-transferring, and optional cross-transferring. 'There is also what's called excessive or systematic cross-transferring, which is to be avoided.' This provides a fascinating example of how people adjust to technology when confronted with the unpredictable nature of local infrastructures, especially those tied to a specific kind of technology and large-scale investment of capital. Moreover, it is possible to think about this communication etiquette as reflecting the process of filming itself. In other words, Sissako draws on what is already a way of life in Sokolo to inform the structure and the argument of his film. This implies a relationship between the expatriated artist and the 'peripheral' place that presents an alternative to current discourses of cosmopolitanism, with their overvaluation of notions of privilege, prestige and symbolic capital.

In her perceptive analysis of *Life on Earth*, Balseiro draws on critics such as Edward Saïd, Eric Hobsbawm and John Durham Peters, to argue that Sissako has through his films 'established himself as a visual chronicler of exile'.²¹ Reading the telephone sequence as symptomatic of Sissako's 'exilic' condition, she writes further:

What Sissako ultimately suggests through this sequence is the inevitability of history as well as the responsibilities one contracts as a historical subject: one must choose what kind of cross-transference is to take place. No matter how much Dramane longs for his roots, he remains suspended between Paris and Sokolo, his voice spread across the spatial and cultural duplicity of exile, as suggested in the letter to his father, where he writes about the self (in exile at the moment of writing) in an attempt to recover glimpses of his past.²²

While the character Dramane, like the director Sissako, is certainly suspended between Paris (the locale for generating funding and postproduction) and Sokolo (the locale which provides the fabric of the

21 Balseiro, 'Exile and longing in Abderrahmane Sissako's *La vie sur terre*', p. 447.

22 Ibid., p. 455.

film and is its actual location), the density of Sokolo suggests that there is more than exile at stake in the director's relationship to the setting.

A place like Sokolo is especially important because of its destitution, and for this reason it *compels* representation. But an artist thus compelled is not drawn by mere altruism or moral consideration. In Sokolo or Luanda, destitution, want and privation embody narratives, and the realistic artist sees an opportunity therein. To speak of exile and longing for place in such contexts may not be mistaken, but it is insufficient. A richer, more productive approach would be to supplement the category of exile with another state, that of diaspora, with the implicit recognition of a home(land) elsewhere, one where the kind of personal or spiritual tension that is characteristic of exile is differently articulated.²³ Thus, one can think of the relationship between a filmmaker and a place in this sense as one of engaged expatriation. The filmmaker may live abroad (Paris in Sissako's case) and see such a location realistically in terms of opportunities for funding and technical support, but he is also engaged with the site of filming, out of a sense of both personal and political moralism and of realism, because a place of destitution is *material*, in the different senses of that word. This is what the infrastructure of telephony represents.

We also sense this in the text of Dramane's letter to his father, in which he says: 'I sent some books to Maiga for Radio Sokolo. I hope he still does his book-on-air library.' The synergy between Maiga's educational initiative and Dramane's moral or financial support for it is proof that though the artist with the camera is expatriated, he is equally engaged to the extent that he draws more than representational inspiration from the reality he is home to film. The engagement could be no more than a proof of the artist's ethical temperament, for Sissako is on record as supporting two radio stations in Sokolo. But it is also a reflection of a sense of realism: if metropolitan Paris is not a suitable location for Sissako's films, Sokolo then attains a position of importance, in spite and because of its destitution. Such an engagement is eloquently captured in Sissako's moral support for the library as well as in the content of Césaire's rhetoric, in which the critique of colonial (and neocolonial) relations resonates both with Sokolo and the end of the twentieth century. The post office, like the FM station (variously called Radio Colonial, Radio Sokolo or *La Voix du Riz*), is a recurring focal point of the film, and its derelict appearance seems to reflect its *usefulness*, underlined by the ironic legend on the panel outside the door: *Le téléphone pour tous, c'est notre priorité!* ('Telephone for all is our priority'). Such is the technical nature of the explanation she receives that Nana Baby plays it safe by choosing 'optional cross-transferring'.

If the business conducted around the post office and Radio Colonial follows a pattern of rationality similar, albeit at a slower pace, to that which obtains elsewhere, how much of the actual experience of the rice farmers is it able to include? When Dramane, ventriloquizing Césaire, uses the introspective voice of the poet to declaim injustice in a

transhistorical reference to life and death without grandeur, we see the farmers marching from the fields towards town. Sullen and silent, this swarm of human queleas trudges through the village in such a forbidding manner that the men are regarded with grave reverence: people clear out of the way or stand respectfully aside; women pause decorously from pounding millet. This unnerving scene is akin to another in the film – the spectacle of a group of youngsters sitting under the eaves, who, over the course of the film, move progressively away from the encroaching sun until they have their backs practically against the wall. The utter silence of these two sequences contrasts with the angry force of the poet's introspective musings, but there is an even more urgent complement to these images in the monotonous dictation of a message, apparently a letter meant for a relative in Paris, spoken in the voice of a man sitting and staring into the camera. It is significant that the voice dictating this letter pauses on occasion, then breaks into the recitations from Césaire's *Cahier*, the dictations and recitations radiating towards the gritty reality of village life and giving contrasting but complementary voices to its current woes. Elsewhere, the therapeutic soundtrack from Salif Keïta's 'Folon' matches the vast landscape of the drought-stricken Sahel, tracking Dramane's walk through the rice fields against the background of the poetic recitations.

If, as Dramane claims in the film, the return is motivated by his decision to film the desire 'to be at Sokolo', it can be argued that there is more to the relationship than simply an expatriate's voyeurism. Fallaux reports one of the filmmaker's brothers as saying, with a hint of disapproval, that 'since his departure [for] Moscow, Dramane has only returned carrying a camera, as an observer'.²⁴ What this perspective ignores is the nature of the place arousing this strong desire; a place so dense in its own way that it encourages and confounds artistic representation in equal measure. Moreover, as we see in Dramane's travels in Angola, the undertaking also represents a process of self-discovery for the artist because the place to which he returns is where the material lies, whether this is taken to mean the interviewees in Luanda or the different layers of life in Sokolo. In this manner, Sissako's work develops a rhetorical, declarative but also meditative character, an aesthetic procedure in which the making of a work of art is transformed into an implicitly conceptual undertaking. Storytelling here is far from simple because mimetic narrative is inadequate to the representational challenges facing the filmmaker. This process is pervasive in *Life on Earth*, and when it is seen in relation to his quest in *Rostov-Luanda* it becomes clearer that the encounters and the infrastructures he depicts are neither accidental nor occasional. They constitute life but, even more urgently, they constitute art, in the precise sense that the ability to produce the films depends on the logic of the places in which they are made. In other words, Dramane's quest in Luanda resonates with the experiences of residents who have a long record of looking for missing relatives, and the texture of life in Sokolo justifies the presence of the

²⁴ Fallaux, 'A cine nomad in Paris', p. 59.

filmmaker. The filmmaker's deployment of a self-conscious visual style both exploratory and poeticized is such that the viewer is invited to contemplate each film as coming from a filmmaker with a conceptual grasp of issues.

Before taking this detailed look at the two films, I argued that works produced in the conjunction of generic and institutional negotiations pertaining to expatriation are shaped by a tension between the ironic distance that a director adopts in relation to his or her subject matter and rhetorical excess, and that this tension is what the director seeks to confront through conceptual filmmaking. I now want to underscore this tension further by returning to the role that the context of production plays in the process. Sissako's work addresses the complications of expatriation and social dislocation by bending genre and developing a conceptual approach to narrative. However, to the materiality of place and the director's artistic temperament we must add a third and no less crucial factor, namely the question of production context. In the interview with Kwame Appiah, Sissako is asked how he came to make *Rostov-Luanda*, and his answer is worth quoting at length for the light it sheds on this conjunction of generic, personal and institutional dynamics:

Well, I should tell you the whole story. I found myself in Zimbabwe with a group of filmmakers. And there were two Angolans among us who were organizing a festival of African films in Luanda. They'd invited two filmmakers who preferred not to come. So, they asked me to come. . . . The festival took place; I stayed on a few more days walking the streets, and then went back to Paris. There I met a director who had spent two years in Luanda. So, I told him how much I had liked the city in the week I was there, and that I would be interested in getting to know that country. And I told him about going back there in search of my friend Bari Banga and how that could be an idea for a film. . . . At the same time, the director of an exhibit of contemporary art in Germany called me to invite me to take part in a series of five documentaries they were planning. She had seen *Octobre*. I said that I had never made a documentary, but the idea appealed to me, and moreover, I already had a topic: the quest for Bari Banga.²⁵

²⁵ Appiah, 'A screenplay is not a guarantee', p. 40.

A number of issues can be pulled out of this response. First, there is the politics of personal recognition, the encounters between Sissako and African filmmakers and European producers providing the basis for the commission long before the idea of the film took shape. Secondly, there is the question of genre, the German gallery director wanting a *documentary*, despite the fact that her familiarity with Sissako's work is on the basis of the short film *Octobre*. Thirdly, Sissako's willingness to work with these demands or requests suggests an open attitude towards institutions as enablers of art in a metropolitan context. Although criticisms of commissioned work in contemporary cinema tend to focus on funding as the most crucial factor in the process, this focus must be

26 For a recent example of this criticism, see Jon Jost, 'Some notes on "political cinema" prompted by seeing Raoul Peck's *Sometimes in April* in competition at the Berlin Film Festival', *Senses of Cinema* <http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/05/35/sometimes_in_april.html> [accessed 17 March 2010]. For a more sympathetic view of the institutional dynamics, see Rod Stoneman, 'South/South axis: for a cinema built by, with and for Africans', in Imruh Bakari and Mbye Cham (eds), *African Experiences of Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), pp.175–80.

27 Michael Renov (ed.), *Theorizing Documentary* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), p. 7.

28 Ibid.; Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994).

combined with others to yield a more fruitful, if more complex, understanding of the kind of filmmaking I have been attempting to describe.²⁶ For Sissako, not only does the relationship to a place become the basis of a rhetorical, intellectualist self-positioning for which Césaire's work is enlisted (in *La Vie sur Terre*), this openness and his conceptual approach allows for recomposition of genre, and his films become generically irreducible to preconceived standards. Scholarship on documentary and other forms of nonfiction film has made a convincing case for their integrity as a way of expanding a cinematic practice traditionally dominated by the feature film. This scholarship presents a broad range of conceptual and analytical tools with which to explore the representational issues at stake in the form generally described as nonfiction.²⁷ One important formulation in this scholarship is the nature of discourse in the nonfiction form which, according to Renov, is *fictive*, much like a conventional feature, because of the ways these genres use trope and rhetoric.

The second issue at stake in the work of an expatriated filmmaker is rhetorical excess, and it is closely related to the question of formal adventurousness. The expatriated film often develops out of a process which invests in the power of art to address issues that, in a representational sense, either confound narrative mimeticism or conventional realism. The rhetoric is not simply a matter of content but becomes a formal device, in such a constitutive manner that generic and formal assumptions have to be suspended, or redefined, while dealing with such works. Criticism of nonfiction films is interested in formal conventions: the tested rules through which art is made, even while implicitly critiquing the settled categories that inform such conventions. Yet apart from their interest in conventional forms, the analyses offered by these critics often sidestep the systemic role of production context.²⁸ In other words, the important questions of the politics and economics of production – personality, funding, technology, manpower – that shape the films in a formal sense, do not receive due attention. I have argued in this essay that those questions are constitutive of form, a matter of 'without which', and in the context of expatriation they find expression in different kinds of narrative strategy, including rhetorical excess. The "opportunities" which enabled Sissako to produce *Rostov-Luanda* are a case of happenstance for which the political rhetoric of Soviet patronage of African countries (Mali and Angola) has to be shaded in to give flesh to the scenario.

The complex intellectual and aesthetic issues at stake in the emergence of the artist whose publics are present but scattered, the artist whose subject matter is visible in its density, simultaneously resisting and courting representation, call for more than an account of rhetorical excess. Indeed, it is the case that this excess is simultaneously subjected to critique by an ironic distance which the filmmaker maintains in relation to his or her subject. The oscillation between the need, the *desire*, to film and the inadequacy of that representational need constitutes a

29 Fredric Jameson, 'Transformations of the image in postmodernity', in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998* (New York, NY: Verso, 1998), p. 124.

paradox for African and postcolonial artist-intellectuals. Sissako's films are formally inventive and irreducible to pre-given standards, but they are products of an intellectual category unthinkable outside of institutions which have educated the filmmaker and which inform the means of production. The good news is that the relationship between expatriation and conceptual filmmaking that we can see in Sissako's work suggests that the paradox is a productive one, and that this formation of the expatriated artist is useful for political engagement; the film *Bamako* is a good example of that potential. In an important discussion of the mediation of non-commercial films through international film festivals, Fredric Jameson seeks to draw attention to 'the ideology of aestheticism',²⁹ as one of the strategies available to directors negotiating the dynamics of globalization and transnationalism. His argument has implications for the impulses I have identified in Sissako's work, especially the impact of contingencies of production on artistic innovation. For Sissako, the contingencies of production are as much the politics of European commission as they are the reality of a destitute African village. The status of a film is determined in the process of juggling the demands of the institutions providing funds and the nature of what is to be filmed, which is simultaneously *compelling* and *repelling*. A subject like everyday life in Sokolo or a lost friend in Luanda is challenging because the socioeconomic problems it throws up appear insoluble, but at the same time the challenges are unavoidable because of the ethical predilections of the engaged artist. Sissako has tried to address these demands by working with form in inventive and conceptual ways, and by constantly relating his expatriate's status, whether privileged or not, to the messiness characteristic of a given place on the African continent.

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Cinema curation as practice and research: the *Visible Secrets* project as a model for collaboration between art cinemas and academics

ANDREW WILLIS

This work was originally presented as part of the launch of the Chinese Film Forum UK (CFFUK)¹ at the Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester. Its origin is relevant, as CFFUK is a network designed to promote and encourage investigation into transnational Chinese film; crucially, this involves a fusion of the work of academic, cultural and arts institutions. To this end, the CFFUK network includes representatives of Manchester Metropolitan University, the University of Salford, the University of Manchester, the Confucius Institute, the Chinese Arts Centre and Cornerhouse, Greater Manchester's leading arts venue. The preparation for the establishment of CFFUK caused me to reflect on the role of cinema programme curation within the profile of a film studies academic. With this in mind, I wish to discuss here the curation of film seasons and retrospectives as professional practice and the ways in which this might relate to an academic's research output. In particular, I want to explore how a particular project with which I was involved, *Visible Secrets: Hong Kong's Women Filmmakers*, offers a model of practice and cooperation between academics and arts institutions engaged in the field of cinema exhibition that might be taken forward by organizations such as CFFUK.

Over the past thirty years, two important developments within the UK have impacted upon the potential for the kind of collaboration *Visible Secrets* represents. The first is the expansion of the publicly funded independent cinema sector in the 1980s:² Bristol's Watershed Media Centre, for example, opened in 1982, while Cornerhouse celebrates its twenty-fifth birthday later this year. The second is the rapid institutionalization and subsequent swift growth of film studies within British universities over the same period. In addition to supporting the establishment of regional film theatres, in the 1970s the British Film Institute also pump primed a series of lectureships in British universities to help establish film studies as a discipline. According to Terry Bolas, these included positions at Warwick (1973), Keele (1974), Essex (1975) and East Anglia (1976).³ To some extent, this initiative in turn led to film studies-based qualifications being established in a number of additional higher education institutions throughout the 1980s. As Bolas has recently observed, since then,

Film and media departments have been established in most universities, recruiting staff with film/media qualifications from similar but longer established departments elsewhere. In some instances departments servicing other disciplines, such as modern languages, have found that offering a film-related option at post-

¹ Details of the CFFUK initiative can be found at <<http://www.cornerhouse.org/film/season.aspx?id=255>> [accessed 8 March 2010].

² The British Film Institute had begun supporting Regional Film Theatres in the 1960s, the first opening in Nottingham in 1966. However, some of these, such as the Southampton Film Theatre, opened in 1967, did not screen films continuously every day of the week <<http://www.thephoenix.org.uk/history.pdf>> [accessed 8 February 2010].

³ Terry Bolas, *Screen Education: from Film Appreciation to Media Studies* (Bristol: Intellect, 2009) p. 366.

4 Ibid., p. 372. In a recent essay on the British Film Institute Archive, Charlotte Brunsdon also suggests support was offered to the Universities of Kent and Stirling; 'In the dark: The BFI Archive', *Cinema Journal*, no. 47 (2008), pp. 152–55.

5 Details of the season and related events can be found at <<http://www.llc.ed.ac.uk/cinema-china/partners.html>> [accessed 8 February 2010].

6 The AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) uses two pieces of exhibition curation and organization as part of its 'Examples of Economic Impact from AHRC-funded projects'. Details can be found at <<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundedResearch/impact/Pages/default.aspx>> [accessed 8 March 2010].

7 The RAE (Research Assessment Exercise) evaluates the quality of research in UK higher education institutions and informs the distribution of funds by UK higher education funding bodies.

8 Details of the RAE submissions under this heading and others can be found at <<http://www.rae.ac.uk/>> [accessed 8 February 2010].

graduate level has generated sufficient student recruitment to help stabilise the department's staffing level.⁴

One might have expected that these parallel expansions in the 1980s would have resulted in a long history of collaboration and cross-fertilization between university film studies departments and independent and regional film theatres. Historically, of course, there have been some notable examples of such cooperation, such as the involvement of the University of Edinburgh in the *Cinema China 07* project.⁵ However, browsing the brochures of most of the main independent cinema venues across the UK over the past year or so would suggest that today this kind of collaboration is the exception rather than the rule. Why might this be the case? It would seem to come down to two significant factors: first, the continued financial squeeze on the independent cinema sector, which in turn appears to be fuelled by and to reflect the continued marginalization of a serious film culture in the UK, particularly when compared to countries like France, Germany and Spain; and second, the fact that many UK film academics are not encouraged by their institutions to work professionally in the area of film exhibition through curation. Whilst it has recently become acceptable, and indeed has been encouraged, for film and media academics to engage in areas of media practice and to present this as legitimate research, this does not seem to have extended to the idea of cinema curation as professional practice and research. It is certainly the case that at the moment film exhibition curation does not hold an equivalent status within film and media studies as it does in related fields, in particular those of art and design.

The notion of curation as a legitimate professional practice in the academic field of art and design has long been established.⁶ At the last RAE in 2008,⁷ the descriptor for what submissions might be included under the UOA64 'Art Architecture and Design' panel included the heading 'Museology and Curatorship'. A brief glance at the subsequent submissions offered by some of the most established educational establishments in the field, such as the Courtauld Institute of Art, shows the curation of exhibitions being offered for assessment alongside more conventional research outputs such as journal articles and monographs.⁸ In fact, four of the staff put forward for assessment by the Courtauld included the curation of exhibitions as one of their research outputs, with one of those submitting two such entries. Within the area of Art and Design, curating exhibitions is a valued and well-integrated element of an academic's profile. Curation is such an accepted part of art and design practice that there are well-established postgraduate programmes devoted to it. For example, at the Courtauld one can study for an MA in 'Curating the Art Museum' whilst the Royal College of Art established an MA in 'Curating Contemporary Art' in 1992, described on its website as follows:

Co-funded by Arts Council England and the RCA, it was the first postgraduate programme in Britain to specialise in curatorial practice as it relates to contemporary art. It is a vocational and academic course designed to provide professional preparation for those wishing to work as curators of contemporary art in both the public and private spheres. The course offers a critical examination of curatorial practice, with special emphasis on the selection and presentation of exhibitions of contemporary art, the programming of public galleries and the commissioning of art for public spaces.⁹

It is noteworthy that the head of the Department of Curating Modern Art is Mark Nash, a former editor of *Screen*, and one of the senior course tutors is Karen Alexander, a professional with a long history of involvement with the field of film programming and curation.¹⁰

In the area of film and media studies, however, curation as professional practice is very rarely mentioned, let alone something that staff are actively encouraged to undertake. This seems strange when one considers the struggle that has gone on over the last decade for the acceptance and parity of professional media practice as research output with other more traditional forms. Significantly, there is little mention of curation in the pages of the organ that has best championed and reflected those shifts, *The Journal of Media Practice*. An honourable exception can be found in a recent article by Sylvia Harvey, which discusses the idea of authorship and practice and explicitly mentions curatorship alongside other professional activities such as scripting, editing and sound design.¹¹ The inclusion of the roles associated with exhibition as part of the wider film industry is also present on the website of Skillset (Sector Skills Council for Creative Media).¹² For Skillset, film practice begins with development then runs through production, post-production and distribution to end with exhibition. In its view, the latter is such a well-established and vital part of the film industry that it offers on its website a job profile in which Ian Wild, from the Showroom Cinema in Sheffield, explains in detail his role as a programmer.¹³

Through an exploration of the *Visible Secrets* project I shall explore how one might present such collaborations in curation as equivalent to other forms of media practice, and how this should lead to their becoming more accepted, and indeed respected, as research outputs within educational institutions. Of course this is dependent upon academics themselves seeking to work more closely with cinema exhibitors and programmers in order to create clear interventions within British film culture.

Visible Secrets: Hong Kong's Women Filmmakers was a major season of films and allied events that I curated jointly with Sarah Perks, Cornerhouse's Head of Programming. It was held originally at Cornerhouse in Manchester throughout October 2009, beginning with the European premiere of Angie Chen's documentary *This Darling Life* (2008) and continuing with various elements including eighteen feature

⁹ Full details of the programme can be found at <<http://www.rca.ac.uk/Default.aspx?ContentID=159506&CategoryID=36692>> [accessed 8 February 2010].

¹⁰ The RCA website identifies that Mark Nash has a long professional interest in curating film-based programmes and states that his 'formation is in film theory and film culture', <<http://www.rca.ac.uk/Default.aspx?ContentID=502641>> [accessed 27 February 2010]. Karen Alexander has recently worked with Bristol's Watershed Media Centre on a range of programming in conjunction with *Abolition 200*.

¹¹ Sylvia Harvey, 'To be an author or not to be?', *Journal of Media Practice*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2009) pp. 81–85.

¹² More on the work of Skillset can be found at <<http://www.skillset.org/skillset/>> [accessed 8 February 2010].

¹³ 'Ian Wild, Cinema programmer', <http://www.skillset.org/film/stories/distribution_and_exhibition/article_3399_1.asp> [accessed 8 February 2010].

films, all previously unreleased theatrically in the UK so that prints of each had to be imported from Hong Kong especially for the season. These included a complete retrospective of Ann Hui's theatrical films since 2000 and three programmes of new short films, especially programmed for *Visible Secrets* by Teresa Kwong of the Hong Kong Independent Short Film and Video Awards and the Hong Kong Arts Centre. There was also a series of supporting public engagement events which included an hour-long introduction to the season, an introduction to the films of Ann Hui and an 'in conversation' roundtable discussion between the curators, Kwong, and directors Tsang Tsui-Shan and Ivy Ho. Alongside these, three of the directors featured in the season (Chen, Tsang and Ho) visited Manchester to discuss with Cornerhouse audiences their work, the contemporary Hong Kong film industry and their experiences as women within it. Further supporting and contextualizing materials for the season were made available via the Cornerhouse website and included a series of podcasts, including interviews with Chen, Tsang and Ho, online film reviews and a special interview with Hui.¹⁴

14 Details of the event may be found at <<http://www.cornerhouse.org/film/season.aspx?ID=233&page=0>> [accessed 8 February 2010].

Following the central event in Manchester, a selection of the *Visible Secrets* titles toured eleven venues around the UK. This part of the project was launched with a special screening of Ho's *Claustrophobia* (2008) at the Curzon Mayfair in London on 2 November 2009, which included an extensive Q&A session with its writer/director. The *Visible Secrets* tour, facilitated by the Independent Cinema Office, then included selected screenings at Watershed Media Centre, Bristol; Broadway, Nottingham; Showroom, Sheffield; QUAD, Derby; Dundee Contemporary Arts; Chichester Cinema at New Park; Chapter, Cardiff; Forum Cinema, Northampton; Eden Court, Inverness; Filmhouse, Edinburgh; and Riverside Studios, London.¹⁵ The inclusion of a tour in the project was important in ensuring that audiences across the country had the opportunity to see examples of the kinds of Hong Kong cinema that rarely reach these regional UK screens.

15 Further details can be found at <<http://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/visiblesecrets.htm>> [accessed 8 February 2010].

From the outset, *Visible Secrets* was a partnership between various interested organizations with a commitment to Hong Kong cinema and, as such, it provides a useful model for future collaboration between academic and arts-based institutions operating within the field of film exhibition. As both these sectors are increasingly working within tightening financial constraints, other collaborators for *Visible Secrets* were sought at an early stage. First was The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office (HKETO),¹⁶ which provided substantial financial support for the event whilst crucially leaving control of the programmes' content to the curators. Other enthusiastic supporters included the Confucius Institute and the Chinese Arts Centre in Manchester.

16 Details of the kind of work undertaken by the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office can be found at <<http://www.hketolondon.gov.hk/home/index.htm>> [accessed 8 February 2010].

Significantly, as curators Perks and I had already established a good working relationship with the HKETO through the *Made in Hong Kong: a Decade of New Cinema* season, which took place in Manchester in 2007. Like *Visible Secrets*, this was a combination of screenings and

17 Further details of the *Made in Hong Kong: a Decade of New Cinema* season can be found at <<http://www.cornerhouse.org/film/season.aspx?ID=194&page=45853>> [accessed 8 February 2010].

related public events, though on a much smaller scale. Concentrating on the period from 1997 to 2007, *Made in Hong Kong* included seven feature screenings representing a mixture of mainstream and art-house work from that decade and incorporating the films of internationally acclaimed directors such as Johnnie To and Wong Kar-wai. The season also incorporated a programme of more experimental short films, again programmed by our collaborator Kwong, some of which were exhibited on the BBC's Big Screen on Exchange Square in the centre of Manchester. As with *Visible Secrets*, supporting the film season was a series of public engagement events and audience materials aimed at promoting a greater critical understanding of Hong Kong cinema. These included a number of film notes made available via the Cornerhouse website, an hour-long introduction to the work of Johnnie To, and an academic symposium devoted to Hong Kong cinema since reunification, organized by Cornerhouse and the University of Salford and hosted by the Chinese Arts Centre.¹⁷ As well as helping to create a working relationship with HKETO and building an audience for Hong Kong cinema in north-west England, *Made in Hong Kong* also, importantly, established a loose association between various institutions across Manchester with an interest in the exhibition of Hong Kong film and Chinese cinemas more broadly. It was with *Made in Hong Kong* that the groundwork was laid for the much more ambitious project that would become *Visible Secrets*.

Crucially, the whole *Visible Secrets* project was underpinned by a substantial body of research that was undertaken over the previous year. Initially, we had thought the season would offer a retrospective of the work of some of the more established names from the Hong Kong industry, such as Clara Law, Mabel Cheung and, of course, Ann Hui. However, when we visited Hong Kong as part of our research we discovered a host of other women directors, many new and young, with whose work we were, for the most part, unfamiliar and who offered a fresher take on the cinema of Hong Kong. Slowly we were able to track down their films and as we watched them a new version of the *Visible Secrets* project began to evolve, one that was much more contemporary and exciting. Here really was a Hong Kong cinema that was relatively unknown in the UK, and our aim became to make a small but significant contribution to UK film culture by rectifying this.

This research in turn sparked our interest in challenging some of the misguided assumptions, both popular and critical, regarding women and Hong Kong cinema; in particular, the notion that there are very few women directors within the Hong Kong film industry, an impression that has undoubtedly been encouraged over recent years by the limited number of their films that make it onto the international film festival circuit and the substantially smaller amount that gain cinema distribution in the UK. From the outset, *Visible Secrets* had a clear agenda. It aimed to show a more complex and multifaceted version of the products of the Hong Kong film industry than normally appears on UK cinema screens

and one that was centred on the contribution of women. *Visible Secrets* was therefore an attempt at a cultural intervention: something that could challenge perceptions of the Hong Kong film industry and reveal that there is much more to it than the high-profile, male-centred action films with which most UK audiences are familiar. This would require the careful selection of films for the season: our starting point was the work of Ann Hui.

In our earliest thinking about the season we had always wanted to include the work of Hui, a major figure within the Hong Kong film industry and someone whom a number of the younger directors included in the programme had identified as something of an inspiration. This finally became one of the key strands of the season – ‘Visible Secret: the 21st century films of Ann Hui’ – and included screenings of *Visible Secret* (2001), *July Rhapsody* (2002), *Jade: Goddess of Mercy* (2003), *The Postmodern Life of My Aunt* (2006), *The Way We Are* (2008) and *Night and Fog* (2009). The last two films on that list had been well received critically in Hong Kong and won numerous awards in Asia but had not found a distributor in the UK. It was important for us to give audiences the opportunity to see this work.

Alongside the Hui selection, the season offered three other main strands: ‘This Darling Life’ represented recent documentary work, such as *Secondary School* (Tammy Cheung, 2003), *Traces of a Dragon: Jackie Chan and His Lost Family* (Mabel Cheung, 2003), *The Decameron* (Yan Yan Mak, 2009), as well as Chen’s *This Darling Life*; the films in the ‘Floating Landscapes’ section focused on new directors and debut features and included serious drama as well as more commercially oriented pieces such as *High Noon* (Heiward Mak, 2008), *Mong Ming* (Susie Au, 2007) and *Wonder Women* (Barbara Wong, 2007); and ‘Hong Kong Snapshots’ comprised three programmes of short and experimental work selected by Kwong. It was the breadth and variety of films selected for the season, along with the engagement events designed to support them, that ensured *Visible Secrets* offered the different view of Hong Kong cinema we were aiming for. The season’s tour, in turn, has had an impact beyond Manchester, across the UK. None of this could have been achieved without the substantial body of research undertaken to inform it.

The extensive collaboration between the various parties who contributed to *Visible Secrets* suggests one way in which academics, if they choose to involve themselves, can have an impact on wider film culture. Mark Cosgrove, Head of Programming at the Watershed Media Centre supports this idea and suggests that academics can bring ‘a deeper more historically and critically engaged perspective’ to such initiatives. He also points out that all parties could gain from such relationships

There’s a mutual benefit in that such initiatives would result in the industry-facing side of the partnership having more academic

¹⁸ From email correspondence with the author, 10 February 2010.

¹⁹ Papers from the *Made in Hong Kong* symposium contributed to a special edition of *Film International*, vol. 7 no. 4 (2009), with a focus on Hong Kong cinema since 1997.

weight – and analysis – and the academy having a better grounding in, and understanding of, the immediate issues facing the industry. The business of film culture has never fully maximized the impact that can result from a connection between the study of cinema in both institutional and aesthetic terms and film exhibition.¹⁸

Those working, or hoping to work, in university film studies departments should argue within their institutions for the importance of film exhibition curation alongside other forms of professional practice as research. Of course traditional academic output can result from these projects,¹⁹ but this may only be a small part of a much wider body of work. As some university courses begin to include modules such as ‘Cinema Exhibition and the Creative Industries’ (Bristol University’s MA in Cinema Studies) or offer programmes focused on film curation (the London Consortium’s forthcoming MA in Film Curating), one can only hope that academics within the field of film studies will be able to put forward forcefully the argument that curating film programmes and seasons should be taken seriously as a form of professional practice – as seriously as other forms of research.

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- 1 Thomas Leitch, 'Adaptation studies at a crossroads', *Adaptation*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2008), p. 63.
- 2 Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and its Discontents From 'Gone with the Wind' to 'The Passion of the Christ'* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 3.
- 3 James Naremore (ed.), *Film Adaptation* (London: Athlone Press, 2000).
- 4 George Bluestone, *Novels into Films* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1957). It is a mark of this founding book's continuing influence that it was reprinted by Johns Hopkins Press in 2003.

Rachel Carroll (ed.), *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture: Textual Infidelities* (London: Continuum, 2009)

Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007)

Adaptation, vol. 1 (2008) and vol. 2 (2009)

Conference of the Association of Adaptation Studies, South Bank, London, September 2009

CHRISTINE GERAGHTY

'After years of being stuck in the backwaters of the academy, adaptation studies is on the move.'¹ So writes Thomas Leitch in a review article in the first issue of the new journal *Adaptation*. And since, as Leitch argues, 'adaptation study has stood apart from the main currents in film theory'² and cinema studies has been suspicious of its origins in literary studies, it seemed worthwhile alerting *Screen* readers to what is happening. Given that so many film and television products are, in one way or another, the products of adaptation, and given the ambitions of those working in adaptation studies, what has been happening in adaptation studies should at least be of interest and might warrant a more active response.

Leitch, in his 2008 essay, argued that adaptation studies was at a crossroads, but it might be more accurate to suggest, as this review demonstrates, that a decisive turn had by then already been made. Throughout the 1990s attacks had been made on the central method and dominant paradigm of adaptation studies: the movement from page to screen, in which a textual comparison is made between a canonical literary work and its adaptation, normally to the detriment of the latter. For many writing in the following decade, James Naremore's edited collection of 2000, which includes a provocative essay from 1948 by André Bazin and a characteristically comprehensive call to poststructuralist methods by Robert Stam, was a turning point.³ The fidelity debate began to peter out; it was no longer necessary to start every account with George Bluestone's 1957 *Novels into Film*;⁴ literary classics were not the only object of study. Not only was the need to move on now irresistible, ways of doing so were becoming clearer. One important factor in bringing together and developing new approaches was institutional. Imelda Whelehan and Deborah Cartmell, who edited a number of influential collections in the 1990s, were successful in obtaining a Leverhulme grant to set up the Association of Literature on Screen Studies which held its first conference in Leicester in 2006, with subsequent conferences in Atlanta (2007), Amsterdam (2008) and, with a significant change of name to the Association of Adaptation Studies, in London (2009). The association's journal, *Adaptation*, began publication with Oxford Journals in 2008, with Leitch, whose *Film Adaptation and its Discontents* was published in 2007, a notable contributor. In reviewing some of the material produced in these contexts, as well as a

5 I should indicate my own involvement in the activities I review here. Although based in film and television studies and with a cultural studies background, I have been engaged with adaptation studies since at least the early 2000s. I attended the inaugural Association of Adaptation Studies conference, gave papers at the Amsterdam and London conferences and have had an essay published in the journal. I trust that, rather than harming it, my informal status as participant observer gives this review some additional insight.

6 Leitch, *Film Adaptation and its Discontents*, pp. 5, 21.

7 Ibid., p. 260.

8 Ibid., p. 20.

9 Ibid., p. 302.

recent edited collection, I hope to point to some of the new paths taken by adaptations studies and indicate why they might be of interest even to those readers of *Screen* who still associate adaptations with Jane Austen and shudder.⁵

I would suggest that Leitch's *Film Adaptation and its Discontents* can, to some extent, be seen as a transitional text. On the one hand, Leitch's opposition to the fidelity paradigm was already well established and the first chapter of the book outlines the consequences for adaptation studies of its institutional positioning in US English Literature departments. Not least of these is the persistence of 'humanist values', the emphasis on aesthetic and moral judgement and the elevation of reading over writing, literature over literacy. Leitch desires, in teaching as well as research, to 'dethrone evaluation as the unmarked or central activity of adaption study' and, drawing on Barthes's distinction between readerly and writerly texts, to replace it with the active sense of rewriting and revision which he associates with the practice of adaptation.⁶ Partly as a consequence, Leitch extends the object of study well beyond the adapted novel to take in the Bible, illustration and picture books, comic books, board games, video games and theme parks. He pays attention to the intentions of the producers, looking at David O. Selznick and Walt Disney among others, and uses a study of the Sherlock Holmes phenomenon to argue that 'whatever particular features they borrow, the feature that is most important is the marketing aura of the original'.⁷ He demonstrates a persistent interest in tie-ins, merchandising and the relationship between films and DVDs, and considers the impact of the potential audiences, whether they be fans of the book and/or Catholic congregations.

Yet Leitch continues, in my view very valuably, to share some of the more traditional concerns and practices of adaptation studies. Thus, although he attacks the fidelity paradigm, he nevertheless ferrets away at the different ways in which fidelity can be an important issue for producers and audience. The problem of fidelity is not banished but reconsidered 'as a problem variously conceived and defined by the filmmakers at hand, not as an unquestioned desideratum of all adaptations'.⁸ Some of the most interesting chapters explore this contingent notion of fidelity by asking what it means to attempt to be faithful to the word of God (in a range of films based on the Bible, including *The Passion of the Christ* [Mel Gibson, 2004]) or to a true story based on an 'appeal to nonexistent precursor texts [which] has the effect of creating these texts through the very act of invoking them', an approach he evidences in films by Sidney Lumet, Martin Scorsese and Oliver Stone among others.⁹ He shares, too, the tendency of adaptation studies' scholars to generalize from examples, to seek to illuminate not just the specific film but the practice of adaptation more generally. Leitch also shares the drive to categorization demonstrated by many adaption theorists who seek to develop a taxonomy of their three (or five or eight or eleven . . .) modes of adaptation. In a highly entertaining chapter,

10 Ibid., p. 120 (italics in original).

11 Ibid., p. 126.

12 See Thomas Van Parys's review in *Image and Narrative*, no. 20 (2007) <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/affiche_findsiecle/vanparys.htm> [accessed 4 January 2010].

13 Rachel Carroll, 'Introduction: textual infidelities', in Carroll (ed.), *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture Textual Infidelities* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 1.

14 Frances Babbage, 'Heavy bodies, fragile texts: stage adaptation and the problem of presence', in Carroll (ed.), *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture*, pp. 12, 20.

15 Christopher Marlow, 'The folding text: Doctor Who, adaptation and fan fiction', in Carroll (ed.), *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture*, pp. 46–57; Pete Falconer, '3:10 again: a remade Western and the problem of authenticity', in Carroll (ed.), *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture*, p. 70.

Leitch does his own version of this, moving from adaptation as *celebration* through *adjustment*, *compression*, *expansion* and more, to *revision*, *colonization* and *deconstruction* and to the 'even more troublesome category: *secondary*, *tertiary*, or *quarternary imitations*'.¹⁰ Leitch is nothing if not logical and he recognizes that this wonderful structure is collapsing when he gets to *allusion*: 'the categories I have proposed . . . are unable to separate particular adaptations into categories because even apparently straightforward adaptations typically make use of many different intertextual strategies'.¹¹ Indeed they do, and one of the pleasures of this book is that Leitch's voracious intelligence generates so much of interest and insight by taking familiar approaches and unlikely comparisons and turning them upside down, while shaking hard.

It has been suggested that *Film Adaptation and its Discontents* is best appreciated as a collection of essays rather than a book in which the arguments are linked by a central methodology.¹² One virtue of this approach is that the case studies are interrogated for what they can reveal and are not forced into one theoretical mould. The danger of replacing one paradigm with another seems at first to be a possibility in the edited collection, *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture*, since we are told in its introduction that 'A film or television adaptation of a prior cultural text – no matter how "faithful" in intention or aesthetic – is inevitably an *interpretation* of that text: to this extent, every adaptation is an instance of textual *infidelity*'.¹³ In jumping out of the fidelity paradigm, Carroll calls up its postmodern counterpart – the poststructural insistence that an adaptation always makes its meaning by acting as an interpretation of another text. This needs to be contextualized, as Leitch does, in relation to specific sources, specific audiences, specific filmmakers and production situations, since much will depend on how other texts are referenced and what knowledge audiences bring with them.

In fact the essays in the collection take a more nuanced approach and offer different accounts of how adaptations work in relation to audiences. This is clear from the first essay, in which Frances Babbage discusses Punchdrunk Theatre's adaptation of Poe's tales performed at London's Battersea Arts Centre in 2007–08. This performance, in which the spectator catches glimpses of the narrative as she/he moves through a labyrinthine installation, encourages Babbage to ask 'how can one evaluate work where spectator engagement has been so fundamentally diverse' and to conclude that the adaptation generated 'impressionistic, individualistic responses' which were affected, at least in part, by how familiar spectators were with the theatre group's previous work.¹⁴ The nature of different audiences' knowledge are a feature of other essays, including Christopher Marlow on the new *Doctor Who* (BBC, 2005–) and Pete Falconer's analysis of how the 2007 version of *3:10 to Yuma* (James Mangold) faced 'the unenviable task of making its generic elements significant' to an audience who were likely to lack the well-developed generic understanding which could be assumed by the makers of the 1957 version.¹⁵ Comparison remains the main method in most of

the essays here, but not just between source and adaptation; the range of media analyzed includes fan literature, photographs, newspaper articles and comedy sketches. As with *Film Adaptations and its Discontents*, there is considerable use of paratextual material, but Iris Kleinecke-Bate's essay on classic adaptations at the BBC shows how detailed textual work can illuminate what is at stake in different versions of a work (in this case *Bleak House*). Elsewhere, an emphasis on gender and identity and on the woman positioned, in different ways, as author is a strong feature of a number of essays.

The two initial volumes of *Adaptation* and the papers given at the London conference continue to demonstrate how adaptation studies is confidently developing away from its traditional approach. Timothy Corrigan's elegant and rich opening address at the conference used Bazin's metaphor of refraction to reflect on the changes in the discipline over the last ten years, but many papers at the conference simply went about their business without feeling the need to engage with past debates or make metadisciplinary comments. Any view of a conference is limited by the papers attended, but I was struck here by two things. First, there was a wide range of material and approaches, ranging from a more traditional but delicate and persuasive textual reading of *Let the Right One In* (Tomas Alfredson, 2008) by Anne Gjelsrik and colleagues to analyses of videogames (Jonathan Maxwell on *Fallout 3*) and true stories in Huw Marsh's analysis of 'adaptation of a crime/crime as adaptation'. There was an encouraging amount of work on British television, with informative papers on, for instance, the classic adventure serial (Richard Butt) and adaptations of Arnold Bennett's work (Lez Cooke). In much of this material the second feature of the conference was demonstrated – an emphasis on production and marketing which could be found in papers as different as David Dunn's authoritative account of how *The Jewel in the Crown* (1984) was shaped by Granada's strong personalities and house style and Ramona Wray's sharp analysis of the selling of *The Tudors* (2007–). Most significantly, it was not just films and television that were positioned in terms of their production; adaptation studies has tended to see literature as free of the commercial constraints of screen media, but here Simone Murray gave an overdue account of how events like book fairs, writers' weeks and festivals provide 'engine rooms of adaptation'. The emphasis on production was reinforced by two papers given by professional writers and adaptors, Diane Lake and Linda Buckley-Archer; Buckley-Archer's account of developing a story in different media at the same time and using scripting techniques to feed back into her novels was particularly striking. Corrigan expressed the view that adaptation studies needed to look backwards, to the insights of Bazin, Bellour and Vachel Lindsay, in order to move forward, but his other call for textual work on adaptations to be situated in its social, industrial and technological contexts was perhaps more evidently heeded here. The range of theoretical methods and topics and the new work being produced by young, up-and-coming scholars was genuinely encouraging.

16 'Introduction to *Adaptation*', *Adaptation*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2008), pp. 2, 4.

17 Simone Murray, 'Phantom adaptations: *Eucalyptus*, the adaptation industry and the film that never was', *Adaptation*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2008), pp. 5–23.

18 Thomas Leitch, 'Adaptation, the genre', *Adaptation*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2008), p. 117.

19 Falconer, '3:10 again', p. 70.

20 Leitch, *Film Adaptation and its Discontents*, pp. 17–18.

The same can be said of the journal *Adaptation*. The editors (Cartmell, Corrigan and Whelehan) distance themselves in the first editorial from some of the 'mindsets [which have] dogged adaptation studies over the last century' and actively seek to 'reset, contest and explore the boundaries' between literary and television and film studies.¹⁶ The essays in the first two issues demonstrate a flexible approach to both the source text and the adaptation. So far as the source text is concerned, the classic novel is overturned: Jeremy Strong writes about team films which fail to acknowledge their origins in now-forgotten books; Alessandro Raengo looks at the adaptation of Jackie Robinson's body image; and David T. Johnson discusses the connections of the documentary *Dogtown and Z-Boys* (Stacy Peralta, 2001) to the work of artist and photographer Craig Stecyk. So far as literary adaptations are concerned, Murray uses a 'phantom adaptation'¹⁷ of the Australian novel *Eucalyptus* to examine the machinery of the adaptation industry, while Ian Brookes reverses the usual practice and uses the film of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960) to analyze two early editions of the book. The range of material studied is certainly not limited to the mainstream. Although the journal includes essays on what might be considered traditional adaptation territory (the Gothic, the classics including Austen and a modern classic, Ian McEwan's *Atonement*), the first two volumes have also featured essays on Owen Land and American structural filmmaking, Maria Maggenti and lesbian screenwriting, and studies of European films.

I have indicated that I agree with Leitch and the editors of *Adaptation* that the discipline is changing and expanding. For some *Screen* readers, particularly those trained in critical theory and cultural studies or those working on production and exhibition, the changes evidenced here may seem not only overdue but unsurprising. But it is worth noting that they seem major within adaptation studies and have generated significant claims. Corrigan, in his plenary address, placed the study of adaptations at the heart of critical endeavour, suggesting that it involved testing out wider boundaries of meaning and value and analyzing the social, industrial and technological materiality of their making. The suggestion that adaptation studies might be a building block in film studies rather than an optional extra is persistent in Leitch's argument that 'adaptation has a serious claim to be not only a genre, but the master Hollywood genre that sets the pattern for all the others'¹⁸ and in Falconer's musing that 'perhaps all genre movies are adaptations'.¹⁹ Here there is a vision of a wider discipline based on the moves that adaptation studies has made; in pressing for more attention to literacy and writing, Leitch argues for the development of 'the discipline of textual studies – the study of how texts are produced, consumed, canonized, transformed, resisted and denied'.²⁰

Film studies scholars may deem it only of minor interest, but we need to consider this shift in the light of the admirably dogged conceptual and methodological rethinking that has led to these developments. Would

film and television scholars be willing to join in this enterprise and what would happen if we substituted ‘media studies’ for ‘textual studies’? Film studies, in particular that branch associated with *Screen*, has cherished its own history and methods while displaying a certain amount of contempt for media studies and a distrust of work on film undertaken by those in other disciplines. Adaptation studies seems to be emerging from a period in which it was obsessed with its object of study and methods of analysis. Now might be a good time for film studies scholars to pay attention.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjq006

Helen Wood, *Talking with Television: Women, Talk Shows and Modern Self-reflexivity*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009)

FRANCES BONNER

I used to worry about the domestic lives of academic writers on television who lamented the prevalence of passive viewers and easily led couch potatoes. What kind of households did they live in? Did they only watch alone with pencil and paper at hand, or were they domestic martinets requiring total attentive silence before the set? It seemed the only explanation of how they gained their impressions of what television viewers were like. Or did they imagine that only they were ‘disrespectful’ of the medium? Slowly a more accurate understanding began to gain prominence; there was a scholarly acceptance that television was not watched reverentially – viewers did other things while the set was on, including talking. Television viewing is rarely silent, even in single-person households. Certainly there are some shows in which viewers may become engrossed and demand silence from fellows or retreat from the big family set to the bedroom one, but talking back to television is as common as talking about something else while the faces on the screen go about their business unheeded. Even in the new modes of viewing, disconnected in various ways from broadcasting and the schedule, the interaction continues. The teenager googling information about the programme being watched will shout out whatever has just been retrieved both to those present and to the screen itself.

Parallel to this early misconception, yet initially used primarily to talk about the unfortunate proclivities of other people, was Horton and Wohl’s concept of ‘para-social interaction’ (PSI).¹ Few other terms about media use coined as early as 1956 are still as fruitful, and *Talking with Television*, Helen Wood’s powerful intervention in our understanding of television audiences, continues to draw on and develop it. A few years ago, Shaun Moores plaintively argued that an accurate formulation would talk of social para-interaction² and while he is right – and Wood’s work emphatically demonstrates that the activity is fully social although the interaction is not fully reciprocal – changing the order of the words

1 Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl, ‘Mass communication and para-social interaction’, *Psychiatry*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1956), pp. 215–29.

2 Shaun Moores, *Media/ Theory: Thinking about Media and Communications* (London: Routledge, 2005).

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- 3 See, for example, Helen Wood, Bev Skeggs and Nancy Thumin, "'It's just sad': the mediation of intimacy and the emotional labour of reality TV viewing", in Stacy Gillis and Joanne Hollows (eds), *Homefires: Femininity, Domesticity and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008).

after all this time is a doomed endeavour. Viewers do establish forms of relationship with figures on television, do talk back to them in ways that are patterned on everyday modes of communicating with others. Yet Wood is right when she claims that her research represents the first documentation of PSI with television as an empirical reality (p. 204). This is possibly because much of the use of PSI has been within psychology-influenced 'effects' research. Wood's key methodological tool is conversation analysis in conjunction with discourse analysis.

Despite various correctives, there are still traces of the previous conception of the televisual dupe to be found, most particularly in the figure of the 'housewife' watching daytime television. It is this conception that is the target of Wood's detailed examination of talk television, its female audience and what they are actually saying as they talk back to the set. She demonstrates that it is not just a matter of talking in a disengaged manner – commenting on the presenter's poor choice of clothes or chatting to a neighbour about something altogether different – but rather an engagement with the topics of discussion and the modes of televisual address that is rich and most deserving of attention.

At the heart of her study is a research method of great refinement. Unfortunately it is not one that can readily applied by most television scholars – it is simply too expensive for most, not to mention requiring painstaking attention to detail and a training in sociolinguistics or related fields. She has deployed it again since the study reported in this book, in collaboration with Bev Skeggs in an ESRC-funded project that further demonstrated its usefulness in analyzing the reception of a range of advice programmes.³ It would be interesting to look at what the technique would tell us about male audiences for programming aimed at them, but the point of this book (and the subsequent studies so far) is that the public concern about the dangers of television shows and vulnerable audiences is focused on women and the entertainment provided for them and not on men and their shows. Not that I personally feel the lack of similar studies of televised sports viewers, but the method is widely applicable and it could be instructive to see it used on other demographic groups.

It is not just matter of idiosyncrasy that Wood chose to study working-class women and their shows rather than respectable public-sphere programming. The essence of the programmes she studies is that they are built on a validation (and exploitation) of personal experience and a concern with the primacy and authenticity of ordinary people's testimony. The dismissal or condemnation within the public domain of the shows and their viewers is founded in this and in the place within it of women's talk. It is for this reason that one of Wood's earliest moves is to align talk shows with gossip. Denigration of both is based on a negative evaluation of the value of women sharing their experiences.

There is no simple reversal of the evaluation of the shows to reveal them as admirable. Wood is not suggesting resistive readings – indeed she dislikes the use of 'reading' and 'text' to frame television analysis.

She locates her study as drawing on cultural studies, sociology and linguistics, and this is certainly evident, but it sits clearly in the British practice of linguistic analysis of media texts by scholars such as Andrew Tolson and Paddy Scannell. Her early discussion of why her study is a useful corrective to, or augmentation of, existing work identifies the problematic adoption by cultural studies of a Saussurean rather than a Volosinovian foundation, which has resulted in the closing down of the study of the mechanics of television discourse. Her closing discussion, and her subtitle, place her findings with the arguments about subjectivity and reflexivity made by Anthony Giddens and Nikolas Rose.

The technique she develops and terms 'text in action' involves screening taped shows to her subjects, watching with them while recording their comments as they watch. This is augmented by focus group discussions and preceded by careful analysis of the British morning shows analyzed – public issue talk shows, more therapy-focused ones and the later morning magazine shows. The transcripts present the words of the speakers of the programme in one column with the comments of the viewer alongside, so that the interaction can be seen and analyzed with great precision.

The discourse of the programmes is heteronormative, centred on and valuing ordinary experience. While the presence of the long-gone *Kilroy* in the sample provides a very strong instance of a show that programatically rejected the views of experts in favour of the greater truth of lay experience, the transcripts reveal how much in tune with the viewers that show's position was. The women in Wood's sample not only repeatedly reject expert opinions and agree with the ordinary people on screen (especially the women), but also use the televisual topics and comments as prompts to add their own experiences of similar or analogous situations.

It is this 'joining in', as if in the studio, that underpins Wood's analysis of mediated communication as a dynamic activity. She worries that her presence increases the willingness of women to vocalize their responses, suggesting that perhaps were she not present the commentary might be more an unspoken one, but to some extent, especially given that her sample was to varying degrees known to her prior to her research, she is replicating family viewing. However, she is most insistent on the specific context of this feminine viewing as taking place in the home in the midst of the daily housework routines, where 'sitting down' to watch is an indulgence.

One of her key assertions is that 'daytime television is experienced as an intimate forum sharing features of social interaction that parallel normative forms of feminine sociability, potentially creating new forms of electronic sociality' (p. 147). This not only demonstrates her concern with ordinary women's everyday practices, but also her belief that the way television operates within contemporary society is still not fully understood. In her conclusion, she argues against seeing new media as radically different in their communicative abilities, but suggests instead

4 See, for example, Graeme Turner and Jinna Tay (eds), *Television Studies after TV* (London: Routledge, 2009).

that they may continue many of the same practices. In the context of arguments made elsewhere which increasingly suggest that we should not see ourselves as already in a 'post-television' world,⁴ this book is further evidence that there is still much to be gained from investigations of ordinary broadcast television and those who continue to watch it.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjq004

Lynn Spigel, *TV By Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network Television*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008, 392 pp.

PAT KIRKHAM

This is another excellent book from Lynn Spigel; well-researched, well-written, well-argued, broad-reaching and investigative, it engaged me more than any other book I have read during the past year. I have some points of criticism, but I want to emphasize that they should be considered within the context of my overall admiration for her groundbreaking project.

Spigel tells readers that she began by wondering what could 'television, that most lowly of low objects, have to do with art' (p. 7) and situates her study as 'part of an ongoing effort among historians and sociologists to better understand the social dynamics of art, commerce, and taste in US culture' (p. 15). Throughout the book she illustrates some of the ways in which television became crucial to discourses on taste from the years after World War II to the early 1970s, a period when 'it acquainted large numbers of Americans with modern art and design on a daily basis, and in the context of their everyday lives at home' (p. 14). Spigel's clear revisionist agenda, serious engagement with modern art, strong interdisciplinary approach and fine balance between detailed empirical research and broader analysis are all admirable. Also admirable, indeed enviable, is her capacity to bring to life on the printed page the contents of individual television programmes. Her detailed knowledge of specific programmes comes through time and time again in this book, so much so that one longs for an accompanying DVD.

The evidence and arguments Spigel presents force us to reconsider how we think about television in this period while filling major gaps in the scholarly understanding of US broadcast television, the history of which, as Spigel points out in the introduction, is too often told by historians with little interest in visual culture. This might seem surprising, given that television is such a visual medium, but it is a mark of not only the narrowness of contemporary academic disciplines but the privileging of nonvisual evidence in academia. The visual is crucial to a study of television, not just because it is a visual medium but also because of the significant design of the material culture related to it – from television sets themselves, to specially designed seating, to trays for holding 'TV dinners'. I feel confident that, after the contents of this

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densely packed publication are unpacked, digested and circulated, many more scholars, across a broad range of disciplines, will take up issues related to television, but also to art and design.

The book opens and closes with strong chapters on television's complex relationship to fine art. Chapter 1 is the broadest, covering the television networks' interest in bringing 'tone' and 'class' to their image and programmes by including and incorporating fine art: many readers will recall Lucille Ball taking lessons from a French sculptor in an episode of the *I Love Lucy* series (p. 4). Chapter 4 covers the ways in which one of the main citadels of modern high culture, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, dealt with the tricky issue of art and television; of negotiating what many people at the time regarded as 'high' and 'low' culture (as indeed many do today). The broad television and fine art theme continues in Chapter 5 with a case study of Ernie Kovacs, 'the father of video art'. This might seem a very narrow case study to those not conversant with the scholarship on video art (very well summarized by Spigel), but Spigel manages to use it not only to discuss the complicated issue of television's relationship to video art but also to comment upon the high culture leanings of most who write about, practice and exhibit video art. In the final chapter, which focuses on Andy Warhol's multifarious relationship with television, Spigel cuts across previous one-sided presentations of the life and work of this former graphic designer turned artist/performer/filmmaker in a nuanced short account of Warhol and his work. These chapters work extremely well together and would have made a great book in and of themselves.

'Design' is present in the book title and in Spigel's statement of aims, and she does consider certain aspects of design as they relate to television, mainly via a case study of CBS's modernist corporate identity as manifested through graphics and new buildings. Despite the fact that the CBS network television building singled out by Spigel as worthy of detailed study was built in Los Angeles (because network executives grasped the increasing importance of that city to television, especially the visual side), Spigel chooses to focus almost exclusively on New York, thus missing out a significant aspect of the story she sets out to tell.

The chapters dealing with design focus on the ways in which CBS used design and architecture as a strategy for success and improved ratings. But the story of companies using 'good design' to increase profits and/or establish a dynamic corporate image is relatively well-known (at least in terms of graphic design history) and certainly better known than the more intriguing story Spigel weaves in terms of the relationship between television and fine art. It may be that she chose to focus on corporate identity because she had access to the archive of William Golden, CBS art director from 1951–59. Interesting as Golden was, however, fifty pages on him is quite a lot, especially given that next to nothing is said of his successor, Lou Dorfsman, who headed design at CBS for many more years than Golden during the period of Spigel's study, and who died only in 2008. However, I was pleased to see mention of Georg Olden, the first

African American graphic designer to ‘make it’ in graphic design and a key ‘pioneer’ designer for television, including opening sequences, but the book does not really illustrate the large number of talented designers and energetic agencies (too numerous to mention here) who were working in the field, especially in the early days. It is surprising that Saul Bass’s work in television in the 1950s and 1960 is only mentioned in passing: ‘Bass also produced title cards for network programs’ (fn. 101, with no reference given), as he designed and filmed several animated and live action sequences, including openers for *The Frank Sinatra Show* and *4 Just Men*, seasonal network promotional advertising for ABC, and a range of commercials promoting everything from baby lotion to major corporations.

Given that the approach established in the ‘fine art’ chapters proved so fruitful, I had hoped that Spigel would examine television in relation to design and architecture in a similar manner, that is, to explore how television presented and used architecture and design on screen to add ‘tone’ and ‘class’ by invoking what MoMA referred to as ‘good design’. An example that springs to mind is Alcoa, a company that had engaged Saul Bass to create a corporate identity programme, commissioning him to create opening sequences for the 1961 Alcoa-sponsored television programme *Premiere*, to which Bass brought the visual creativity that shot him to world fame with film title sequences for *The Man With The Golden Arm* (Otto Preminger, 1955) and *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958). Given this fame, his work in television from the mid 1950s might be seen as part of the wider determination of certain companies and television networks to raise their image through ‘good design’.

Equally, another, more literal, link attempt came in 1956 when the now famous black leather Lounge Chair and Ottoman designed by Charles and Ray Eames of Los Angeles made its first public appearance – on New York-based network television. NBC’s *Home* show (tx. 12 March 1956) presented this well-upholstered chair and stool on a pedestal with great fanfare and spot lighting, as if it were a work of art as opposed to a piece of mass-produced furniture. Yet the Eameses themselves presented it as the latter later in the same show, by means of a fast-cut short film showing a man assembling and disassembling all the various parts.¹ Television even played a role in the conception of the chair. The project was prompted, in part at least, by the Eameses’ close friend Billy Wilder repeatedly telling them of his desperate need for a ‘great looking’ modern chair that was also sufficiently comfortable for sustained television viewing.² Like MoMA – the institution that helped establish an international reputation for Charles Eames as a modern male American superstar designer when, in 1946, it gave him a ‘one-man’ show (consisting of objects that were all jointly designed with his wife!) – the show’s host, Arlene Francis, also focused on the male designer of the partnership.³

Spigel does mention Charles Eames, in passing, when discussing the ‘boomerang’ design of the titles for the Chrysler-sponsored *An Evening*

- 1 For the television debut, see Thomas Hine, ‘Half a century of lounging: sightings and reflections’, in Martin Eidelberg et al. (eds), *The Eames Lounge Chair: an Icon of Modern Design* (New York, NY: Merrell, 2006), pp. 30–39; and for the chair in general, see Pat Kirkham, ‘The evolution of the Eames lounge chair and ottoman’, in *ibid.*, pp. 42–63.
- 2 Billy Wilder, in conversation with the author, Los Angeles, 1994.
- 3 Pat Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), pp. xx to xx.

with *Fred Astaire* (1959), suggesting it ‘resonated with similar boomerang designs ... for ‘moderne’ furniture such as Charles Eames’s famous boomerang coffee table’ (p. 60). Unfortunately, this and other observations demonstrate that Spigel is at her least convincing when discussing design. Although she manages better with the more well-known fields of art (her bibliography is also stronger on art than design), at times she struggles with language, contexts and histories of design with which she seems less familiar. For example, it is now well known that Charles Eames worked in full partnership (including on films) with his wife Ray, from 1941 to 1978, and that they both worked with people in their design office, hence attributions are usually either to Ray and Charles Eames or to the Eames Office. In addition, no ‘boomerang’ table ever came out of that office, while the term ‘moderne’ makes no sense in terms of their designs. Interdisciplinary work is difficult and Spigel is often one of the best, but the weaknesses relating to design in this publication suggest that we all need to work harder towards greater collaboration between film and television historians and design historians.

One further point bothers me here. Given Spigel’s brilliant track record in terms of validating areas of culture considered ‘lesser’ or ‘low’, her decision to not consider design in the same manner as fine art seems to place design in the ‘lesser’ category from which so many have tried to rescue it, thus effectively replicating conventional hierarchies of taste and value. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when design and the decorative arts were also known as ‘applied arts’ or ‘lesser arts’, they included ‘commercial art’ that later came to be known as graphic design. However, despite the best efforts of design reformers from William Morris onwards, and design historians and material culture scholars since the 1970s, that high/low divide still operates within the study of visual culture. Indeed, the lack of interest in ‘low’ culture was one of the reasons many scholars abandoned (fine) art history in the 1970s to establish a new discipline of design history. And that takes me back to the need for greater interdisciplinarity.

Such niggles aside, I want to congratulate Spigel on giving me my most stimulating read in a while, and to applaud her dedication in taking on such a major project and pointing to new and interesting directions for thinking and writing about television. I have started to use this book in class, and from the general ‘buzz’ about it I sense that is already propelling television studies into new fields. This is a book to be read in its entirety for the big picture, or bigger pictures, and to be treasured for the detail within a series of fascinating case studies.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjq008

Darrell Varga (ed.), *Rain/Drizzle/Fog: Film and Television in Atlantic Canada* (Cinemas Off Centre Series). Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2009, 318 pp.

SARAH A. MATHESON

As Darrell Varga explains in his introduction, the title of the anthology *Rain/Drizzle/Fog: Film and Television in Atlantic Canada* comes from Rosemary House's 1998 documentary *Rain, Drizzle, and Fog* (NFB, 1998). Varga writes: 'The film integrates the history and geography of St. John's, Newfoundland, with the processes of culture through which geographic space is transformed into lived place' (p. ix). Inspired by the film's depiction of culture and community, a similar ethos informs this book which, according to Varga, attempts 'to understand identity not as a national imaginary, but as something produced in the lived experience of place' (p. xii). In responding to past 'national cinema' approaches within Canadian film studies which, it may be argued, have privileged the significance of nation and national identity at the expense of other more marginalized forms of identity and belonging, this book usefully shifts the focus to an interrogation of the concept of the regional. In doing so, it reflects the mandate of the University of Calgary Press's 'Cinemas Off Centre Series' (edited by Malek Khouri) which, according to the Press's catalogue, 'highlights bodies of cinematic work that, for various reasons, have been ignored, marginalized, overlooked, and/or obscured within traditional and dominant canons of film and cinema studies'. As an introduction to the subject matter it provides a small yet stimulating glimpse into what is a rich, varied and complex terrain. It is not a comprehensive survey of film and television in Atlantic Canada, as Varga acknowledges: 'We do not claim to account for the entire production history of the region' (p. ix). What it does offer is an invaluable collection of thought-provoking essays (thirteen in total) that examine the production of region and its diverse meanings within different forms of screen culture in Atlantic Canada.

One of the main strengths of the collection is its critical engagement with the concept of region itself. As Varga notes: 'The contributors to this book approach the concept of region not simply as a function of geography but also as an idea that is produced through conditions of economy, social organization, and politics, among other factors' (p. xiii-xiv). Firmly anchored in the social and political histories, industrial conditions and government policies of the times being discussed, the authors avoid treating region as a static or essentialist entity. Instead, they each explore different dimensions of what the regional signifies and the varying ways in which selected filmmakers and audiences may negotiate, mobilize and grapple with these representations of space and place. As a result, the book allows one to gain an appreciation of the diverse nature of Atlantic Canada and aspects of its unique film and video culture. In addition, its case studies also

demonstrate how a focus on the regional may enable an important rethinking of centre–periphery, national–regional and local–global relations. Scholars will find this collection interesting as much for what the case studies reveal about these sorts of dialects as for the specific film and video practices that are examined.

Overall, the anthology devotes more attention to documentary filmmaking; however, it also includes chapters on films by key fiction filmmakers from Atlantic Canada (William D. MacGillivray, Thom Fitzgerald, Andrea Dorfman), popular television series (*Don Messer's Jubilee*, *Trailer Park Boys*) as well as texts that have received less attention (*John and the Missus*, *Gullage's*). Another strength of the book is its inclusion of both film and television, which in Canada tend to be studied independently. There is an important recognition of how the film and television industries are intertwined in this country and the significance of television as a medium of distribution for film in Canada. However, television is approached as more than just an adjunct to film as the book also provides space for a consideration of how specific television series participate in the construction and representation of region.

The essays are not organized under general headings or grouped around clear themes. The anthology opens with two chapters that are broad in scope: Colin Howell and Peter Twohig provide an overview of the depiction of Atlantic Canada in NFB films, while Pierre Véronneau presents a similarly broad summary of the history of Acadian cinema. Both chapters provide a useful 'big picture' approach that helps orient the reader to the larger themes, issues, events and institutions that have shaped filmmaking in the region. Readers with less familiarity with the subject matter will particularly appreciate the histories that are outlined in these chapters. The subsequent essays offer more limited case studies that focus on specific films, television series and locales. At first glance, the chapters appear to be somewhat disparate. However, as one reads through the book a number of core themes begin to appear, providing a degree of coherence.

One such recurring theme is how policy, the industrial conditions of regional film and television production, and the context of global capitalism shape portrayals of space and place. These issues surface throughout the book, but provide an especially important context for analysis in chapters by Malek Khouri, Darrell Varga and John McCullough. McCullough's chapter on the television series *Gullage's* (1996–98) and *Trailer Park Boys* (2001–), for instance, relates their rendering of the regional to changes in television production and policy since the mid 1990s. In contrast to previous images of the regional that were characterized by the logic of nation-building, McCullough argues that 'contemporary regionalist representation is a direct result of market logic' (p. 155). He writes that 'The portrayal of the Maritimes in *Gullage's* and *TPB* is consistent with the structural changes in television culture in Canada, and their representations of Canadian space and

characters are also directly related to the larger structural changes taking place in global capitalism' (p. 155). Chapters such as this demonstrate how place is not something simply reflected in these artefacts, but instead emerges from, responds to and is shaped by a variety of historical, economic and cultural forces.

Another recurrent concern in the collection is how stereotypes have contributed to perceptions of the region. Enduring stereotypes such as the nostalgic, pastoral landscape of Atlantic Canada and its antimodern, authentic, folk culture are addressed in a number of chapters which consider how film and television may reproduce and reaffirm these sorts of stereotypes as well as how they may work to contest them. It is interesting that some of the most nationally and internationally recognized popular depictions of Atlantic Canada (most notably *Anne of Green Gables*) are not discussed at length in this book. Instead, more attention is given to films and series that provide a different and perhaps more complex engagement with issues surrounding place. These include texts that resist what contributor Andrew Burke describes as 'heritage cinema': films that, like *Anne of Green Gables*, rely on a rural, picturesque image of Maritime life. In his insightful analysis of Andrea Dorfman's 2000 film *Parsley Days*, for example, Burke shows how this tradition is resisted by anchoring the characters and narrative within the specific urban geography and working-class milieu of Halifax's North End.

In summing up the stakes surrounding representation, Noreen Golfman writes that 'It is about who has a right to speak for and produce images of a place where people live and work, about who is representing what, when, and for whom' (p. 79). This informs her fascinating look at the depiction of the seal hunt as she demonstrates how Newfoundland filmmakers have attempted to counter the dominant imagery disseminated by animal rights groups, which have been so successful in marshalling emotionally charged images to support their cause. Her incisive analysis of the documentaries *White Thunder* (Victoria King, 2002) and *My Ancestors Were Rogues and Murderers* (Anne Troake, NFB, 2006) shows how, in different ways, they offer a 'counter-discourse' to international protests by emphasizing the perspectives and lived experiences of Newfoundlanders themselves.

While issues surrounding representation are privileged, *Rain/Drizzle/Fog* also includes work on reception and consumption. Gregory Canning, for example, offers an interesting social history of film exhibition in the town of Truro, Nova Scotia (1897–1914) which complements the recent urban histories conducted by scholars such as Paul Moore that similarly emphasize the importance of local specificity to understanding moviegoing practices.¹ Here Canning's analysis highlights the significance of the rural and small-town experience. Jen VanderBurgh considers audience response in her analysis of the public outrage surrounding the cancellation of the popular 1960s CBC musical variety show *Don Messer's Jubilee* (1959–69), a series produced out of Halifax

1 Paul S. Moore, *Now Playing: Early Moviegoing and the Regulation of Fun* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008).

that showcased the famed Maritime fiddler. Vanderburgh analyzes how the public reaction to the show's demise was expressed through the unprecedented volume of viewer letters written to CBC and to Messer himself. Her analysis unearths the class and ethnic tensions within the popular response as she argues that 'The language of the letters show how arguments over national television content reveal themselves to be thinly veiled disputes about the nation' (p. 146).

A final theme explored in a number of essays specifically highlights the role of various institutions in the region. The immense influence of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) to regional film and video culture is frequently discussed (most notably in Bruce Barber's analysis of Thom Fitzgerald's 1990 film *The Movie of the Week*). The involvement of government cultural institutions is also examined and critically assessed. This is something Howell and Twohig and Véronneau consider in their chapters as they describe the contradictory presence of the NFB. In her look at grassroots film and video movements in Halifax, Tracy Zhang outlines the challenges presented by the involvement of agencies such as the NFB and the Canada Council for the Arts. One of the most engaging chapters in this vein is Jerry White's look at Colin Low's Newfoundland Project from the *Challenge for Change* series undertaken by the NFB in the 1960s. White argues that the films have been primarily discussed as part of the social mission associated with this community filmmaking programme. In reconsidering their impact and perceptions about their lack of aesthetic value, White attempts to 'recover these films not only as examples of community-based media making ... but as an aesthetically sophisticated form of non-narrative, poetic cinema' (p. 103).

The collection ends with an inspiring chapter by filmmaker Sylvia Hamilton, who details the processes involved in the production of her film *Portia White: Think on Me* (2000). While largely excluded from Canadian music history, Portia White, an African Nova Scotian, was a nationally and internationally renowned classical singer in the 1940s and 1950s. In describing what motivated her to undertake what she describes as a 'rescue mission' in telling White's story, Hamilton sheds light on the racism White experienced in her lifetime and stresses the crucial and continuing importance of bringing forward these marginalized histories.

There are many strong chapters and much to admire in *Rain/Drizzle/Fog*. It is not intended to be an exhaustive treatment of its subject, but instead presents an interesting sampling of the new research being conducted in this area; it will undoubtedly be viewed as an important contribution to Canadian film and media studies.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjq010

Lee Wallace, *Lesbianism, Cinema, Space: the Sexual Life of Apartments* (Routledge Advances in Film Studies series). New York, NY: Routledge, 2009, 202 pp.

JASMINE RAULT

Regular readers of *Screen* might be familiar with Lee Wallace's careful attention to the complex filmic contortions involved in representing sexual dissidence, and the peculiar but persistent cinematic relation between domestic architecture and lesbian desires or characters. This book gives us both the rigorously close readings of sexually dissident effects achieved by cinematic visual techniques (mise-en-scene, continuity, temporal and spatial editing) that readers of Wallace's work may have come to expect, and a compelling feminist argument for broadening queer critical attention from mostly gay male public space to distinctively lesbian private space.

Lesbianism, Cinema, Space concentrates on the role of apartment spaces in representing lesbian characters, desires and storylines in films released just before or mostly after the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association lifted the Production Code prohibiting depictions of 'sex perversions' (including, of course, homosexuality). The book's eight chapters include a substantial introduction and conclusion, and six chapters considering six (almost seven) films which revolve around lesbian characters or desires: *The Children's Hour* (William Wyler, 1961); *The Killing of Sister George* (Robert Aldrich, 1968); *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1972), with a significant discussion of *High Art* (Lisa Cholodenko, 1999); *Single White Female* (Barbet Schroeder, 1992); *Bound* (Wachowski Brothers, 1996); and *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001). Despite their differences in genre, style and historical context, Wallace proposes that 'The post-Code films selected for this study have one thing in common: the lesbian story they tell crucially depends on the apartment space in which it is set' (p. 1). Wallace develops this disarmingly simply stated claim into an argument that engages lesbian cultural history, cinema and sexual dissidence and, perhaps most significantly, contemporary studies in sexuality and space.

Lesbianism, Cinema, Space focuses on post-Code films not so much to emphasize the transformation in representations of lesbianism precipitated by lifting this repressive policy in 1968 but more to suggest the continuity between pre- and post-1968 film strategies for generating lesbian effects. Starting with *The Children's Hour*, Wallace provides close formalist analyses of six films, released between 1961 and 2001, to show the 'continued dependence of lesbian representation on cinematic form and style rather than character and plot ... the terms by which lesbianism plays out on screen from the 1960s forward are almost completely consistent with the terms set across the previous decades' (p. 15). The implication she goes on to explore is that lesbianism in these

1 Annamarie Jagose,
*Inconsequence: Lesbian
Representation and the Logic of
Sequence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell
University Press, 2002), p. 2.

films, like all sexuality and sexual identity, is the product of visual, framing and editing techniques – necessarily contingent, unfixed and unfixable. This is a familiar theme in sexuality studies, but specifically contributes to an understanding of what Annamarie Jagose describes as ‘the ambivalent relationship between the lesbian and the field of vision’.¹ As Wallace puts it: ‘The spatiotemporal coordinates of the cinematic apartment bring into the field of representation female homosexuality, a sexual formation that has a notoriously difficult relation to visibility’ (p. 2). Wallace’s major contribution to the field of sexuality studies is her exploration of the centrality of domestic space to producing the twentieth-century effect of a communicable lesbian identity.

Wallace theorizes the cinematic apartment as a twentieth-century lesbian chronotope – one, she argues, which has been largely overlooked by studies of lesbian cultural history, as well as contemporary sexuality and space. ‘Neither entirely private nor entirely public, the apartment house bridges or confounds a number of oppositions that the schoolroom and bar chronotopes tend to keep separate: privacy and publicity, domesticity and urbanity, innocence and corruption, work and leisure’ (p. 11). Thinking of apartment space as a lesbian cinematic chronotope allows us to reconsider the cultural and politicized relevance of private space for female sexual dissidence in both film and social life. Wallace thus works her film studies of lesbians and apartments in the service of her critique of the tendency within gay and lesbian studies ‘to concentrate on public sex culture and advances ... [and so treat] gay male sexual practice as the paradigmatic model for the homosexual occupancy of social space’ (p. 14). The far-reaching critical implications of this turn to studying the dissident sexual cultures and politics of mostly private (apartment) spaces rather than mostly public (street, bar, bathhouse) spaces are not fully explored until the book’s conclusion. However, in a series of case studies she argues convincingly that at least six films figure lesbianism as an effect of such primarily private spaces.

It would be impossible for me to do justice here to the careful and intricate formalist analyses developed in each of these chapters: framing and camera angles in the *Killing of Sister George*; mise-en-scene storytelling in *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* and *High Art*; the aural and visual challenge to heterosexual privacy and stability performed by the corridors, elevators, thin walls, windows, stairwells and air ducts of New York’s Ansonia apartment hotel in *Single White Female*; graphic devices and sleight-of-hand continuity editing in *Bound*; the unplaceable and open-ended diegesis of lesbianism in *Mulholland Drive*. Taken together, these detailed analyses show that film’s sexual content (lesbian, gay or heterosexual) is as much a spatiotemporal effect as it is a product of storyline or character. The book shows the persistence in post-Code films of pre-1968 strategies for screening dissident female sexualities extradiegetically – outside plot, narrative or character development – yet it also wants to suggest that the cinematic apartment as lesbian chronotope symptomatizes and contributes to a massive historical

- 2 Bridget Elliott, 'Housing the work: women artists, modernism and the *maison d'artiste*: Eileen Gray, Romaine Brooks and Gluck', in Bridget Elliott and Janice Helland (eds), *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts, 1880–1935: the Gender of Ornament* (Burlington, VT and Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 176–96; Bridget Elliott, 'Art deco hybridity, interior design and sexuality between the wars: two double acts: Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Archer/Eyre de Lanux and Evelyn Wyld', in Laura Doan and Jane Garrity (eds), *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 109–29. Jasmine Rault, 'Designing Sapphic modernity', *Interiors: Design, Architecture, Culture*, vol. 1, no. 1 (forthcoming, July 2010).
- 3 For an excellent account of gay and lesbian liberation in contemporary constitutions of US exceptionalism, the war on Iraq and violence against Muslim men and women, see Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

change in visual conventions and the 'extraordinary transformation in lesbian life worlds from the 1960s to 1990s' (p. 11).

I have to admit to being much more compelled by the argument for sexual-visual-historical continuity than by the suggestion of an 'extraordinary transformation' or the progress narrative it seems to support. That is, the book hopes to speak as much to cinematic lesbianism in a post-Code era as it does to lesbian life worlds in a post-Stonewall era of 'gay liberation' – a phrase used but not critically interrogated or theorized throughout the book (for example, pp. 34, 121, 137). I cannot help but wonder whose 'liberation' this actually refers to, which leads to the absence of the historical, race, class and queer scholarship with which I would have liked to see the book engage more consistently. Wallace argues that:

these five lesbian apartment stories help achieve – albeit in the conflicted way that popular culture always achieves its social advances – the new social landscape of which we real-world lesbians are now the beneficiaries. Behind the hysteria and violence, these films depict some of the things that many of us work hard to attain; for instance, a seamlessness between a lesbian homelife and a lesbian work life, unthinkable in the 1970s outside women's collectives and a handful of creative industries. (p. 11)

This progress narrative sits uneasily with, first, the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century histories of mostly upper-class, white women artists, writers, performers and designers (especially in the US, UK and France) who worked on and in their domestic spaces to forge non-heterosexual home, work and life worlds;² and secondly, the class, race and national specificity to the 'social advances' of which 'we real-world lesbians are now the beneficiaries'. That is, not only do very few, very specifically racialized and classed women in only a minority of national contexts attain a 'seamlessness' between lesbian home and worklife, but the fact that these few do has come to be used dangerously to support the 'liberation' of variously racialized, classed and ethnicized (especially recently Muslim) bodies, cultures and countries. Such historical and contemporary political oversights can contribute to the dangerous celebration of specifically raced, classed, cultural and citizenship privileges as 'liberation'. That is, I am wary of such a narrative of progress, which can work to obscure ongoing violence against queered bodies, subjects and privacies in both the few overdeveloped countries which advertise their attained sexual liberation and elsewhere.³

However, the argument that emerges by the book's conclusion has the potential to disrupt both this problematic narrative and the demonization/dismissal of domestic space to which it is so often linked. Wallace returns to her critique of the tendency in gay, lesbian and queer studies to privilege public sex as inherently more progressive, liberatory or radical than the dissident sexual uses and inhabitations of private

space. She outlines some of the class and gender exclusions endemic to this line of inquiry into, and occupation of, ostensibly 'public' space, and draws attention to the long cultural history of lesbian (and gay) world-making in 'private' space. Noting that 'lesbian communities frequently manifest on a social network model and lack of economic infrastructure associated with gay enterprise that is needed to sustain a territorial model of spatial occupancy', Wallace argues that we need to generate 'a less abstract and idealizing account of public-sex sites' (p. 128) and take seriously the complex combinations of 'sexual privacy and sexual publicity, domesticity and urbanity, innocence and corruption' (p. 137) enabled by the cinematic and real-life lesbian apartment. Her argument suggests that the classed, gendered and sexualized power relations sustained by the distinction between private and public might be better (or at least as effectively) challenged by accounting for queer configurations of and affiliations with domestic space.

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Alison Griffiths, *Shivers Down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums and the Immersive View*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008, 372 pp.

STÉFANY BOISVERT AND VIVA PACI

Among the books at the intersection of cultural studies, media studies and arts theory, some can also be usefully applied in the field of film studies. These works generally address the interrelation between the spectator gaze, the device regulating this gaze, and the various modes of representation resulting from this particular interaction. Foremost among these books, both European and American, published in the last thirty years are Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *Geschichte der Eisenbahnreise*, Max Milner's *La Fantasmagorie* and Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer*.¹ Alison Griffiths's *Shivers Down Your Spine* can now be added to this list.

In this review of Griffiths's book, commentary on the nature of cinema – a medium that *mummifies* and *embalms* time – within an exhaustive study of the history of museums and museology (specifically the museology of scientific exhibitions) may clarify such previously hazy concepts as immersion and interactivity.

In her book, Griffiths recounts how in 1799 a spectator saw a panorama exhibition which he described as having sent 'shivers' down his spine. Thus, despite the current hype surrounding the concepts of 'immersion' and 'interactivity' informed by their presumed novelty, it would seem that immersive modes of spectatorship are far from new. Choosing the panorama spectator's experience as the title for her book, Griffiths argues that the concepts of immersion and interactivity are older than some might think, being associated, among other things, with museums, panoramas and mediaeval cathedrals, 'antecedents for today's so-called

¹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Geschichte der Eisenbahnreise: Zur Industrialisierung von Raum und Zeit im 19. Jahrhundert* [1977]/ *The Railway Journey* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986); Max Milner, *La Fantasmagorie. Essai sur l'optique fantastique* (Paris: PUF, 1982); Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: on Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

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¹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Geschichte der Eisenbahnreise: Zur Industrialisierung von Raum und Zeit im 19. Jahrhundert* [1977]/ *The Railway Journey* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986); Max Milner, *La Fantasmagorie. Essai sur l'optique fantastique* (Paris: PUF, 1982); Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: on Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

immersive and interactive new media' (p. 4). However, another important factor common to these environments is their *size*. The size of the universe which is created through a particular visual representation plays a key role in the emotional response of the spectator: in other words, size can inform the quality of our shivers. As Jean-Luc Godard said, 'When we go to the movies, we raise our head. When we watch television, we lower it.' When we are looking up at the sky, we may be more likely to be swept away by what we observe.

Unfortunately, this notion of size is neither central to, nor sufficiently taken into account by, Griffiths's book: in order to pair the main ideas of immersion and interactivity, Griffiths places the various environments outlined in her book under the broad category of time-based media. This is perhaps the weakest aspect of an otherwise original and interesting book. The tendency to link the concepts of immersion and interactivity needs careful thought. In our opinion, a crucial distinction needs to be made between the fact of being 'immersed' in a particular environment and the possibility, less common yet sometimes available to the spectator, of interacting with this environment and modifying it. For example, it could be argued that any diegetic absorption in a narrative universe, be it a movie or a novel, is itself an immersion; indeed this idea has been debated since Aristotle's *Poetics*. But when the terms 'immersion' and 'interactivity' are linked specifically in the field of media studies, we must refer to a much more limited and precise definition of terms. There are a number of technological contexts where interaction between spectator and environment is maximized: for example, technological prototypes at a trade fair, motion-capture devices in a CGI studio, or in operating theatres where the surgeon works by moving electronic tools. In all these contexts interactivity is taking place but it is difficult to speak of it in terms of immersion; in order to interact adequately with the environment, the user – who cannot really be identified as a spectator – is always quite conscious of being 'outside' of the environment. Consequently, the concept of *contemplation* might have been more appropriate to describe the multiple sensory and emotional experiences described in Griffiths's book, and might refer more accurately to the particular position of the spectator, and his or her subjugation, while experiencing a planetarium, museum, panorama exhibition or an IMAX movie, for example.

Shivers Down Your Spine provides a historical account of various modes of representation and analyzes immersive settings that have the capacity to create these shivers and to take us *elsewhere*. According to Griffiths, the representations described in her book are associated with 'alternative modes of spectatorship' (p. 1) that bring something different to traditional representational forms such as '2-D movies or panel paintings' (p. 3). Hence this book proposes an expanded paradigm of spectatorship that some traditional approaches to film neither take into account nor explain. For instance, one of the key characteristics of the

‘spectacles’ discussed here is that the spectator, far from being simply seated in an auditorium, is generally mobile.

It is important to emphasize that Griffiths describes the active spectator in contrast to the ‘passive’ spectator, who exists only as a theoretical or abstract concept. Even spectators watching a regular movie ‘simply’ projected on a screen, and who are therefore part of a classical cinematic representation device, are not ‘passive’. Griffiths’s discourse perhaps falls victim to the overglorification of interactivity within media studies. On the one hand, this interest in interactivity provides Griffiths with the fascinating idea of journeying back in time in search of older interactive exhibits, which enables her to clarify some assumptions about the novelty of the concept of interactivity. On the other hand, the need to emphasize the activity of the spectator prompts her to attribute an ontological specificity to this mode of viewing, even though every or any spectator might be characterized as such.

In the first part of her book, Griffiths attempts to provide a better understanding of the particular modes of spectatorship provided by immersive/interactive spectacles. She presents four particular modes of spectatorship, namely the mediaeval cathedral, the panorama, the planetarium and the contemporary IMAX theatre. Although including the mediaeval cathedral might seem odd to some, Griffiths asserts that its space provides both an immersive environment as well as a series of embodied experiences for the spectator. Crucially, the cathedral visitor has to gaze upward in order to fully grasp the visual spectacle of the building. Moreover, the experience generally leaves the spectator awestruck and to some offers an impression of being in real communion with God. The nineteenth-century panorama similarly provided an immersive mode of spectatorship and an embodied experience for the spectator; a huge 360-degree painting that occupied the whole field of vision, the panorama made a real attempt to take its viewers elsewhere through large-scale hyperrealistic representations.

Griffiths next explores the sensation of being immersed in the image and the concept of virtual travel that new media such as IMAX theatres and 360-degree technologies seem to offer the spectator, demonstrating, as she suggests, that ‘a fascination with immersive, expanded vision has persisted over time’ (pp. 9–10). She also highlights the planetarium, a display offering the spectator a highly immersive experience and a kind of virtual time travel. Without ignoring the differences between these various modes of spectatorship and the unique experience that each of them provides, Griffiths demonstrates that these visual spectacles all promote a certain kind of reenactment that engenders new and frequently uncanny modes of seeing, defined by an experience of immersion and virtual travel.

The second part of Griffiths’s book is most instructive: here she focuses exclusively on museums, such as the London Science Museum, the Smithsonian Institution and the American Museum of Natural History, to analyze the immersive and interactive ‘modes of spectating’

- 2 Viva Paci, 'Taxidermie : réflexions sur cinéma et musée', paper given at the 11th Colloque international du Centre de recherche sur l'intermédialité, *Muséalité et intermédialité : nouveaux paradigmes des musées*, Université de Montréal, 29 October 2009.

as well as the importance of 'screen culture' now found in these exhibition sites. Defined as a 'centrifugal force' in the study of immersive and interactive environments, museums are explored through their provision of various important exhibitions with realistic settings and embodied modes of spectatorship for the visitor. As these interactive and immersive settings become increasingly incorporated within museum exhibition practice through the use of screen-based technologies, touch-screen computers or reconstructed environments, Griffiths provides a historical context for this 'paradigmatic shift in exhibition practice' (p. 191). Despite her enthusiastic support for these practices, the book raises important questions regarding the impact, the efficiency and the future of multimedia technologies in museums: will new visitors, now surrounded everyday by digital technologies, get bored with the interactivity located in these institutions; might these high-tech gadgets 'overshadow' the objects that the exhibition is designed to promote?

Shivers Down Your Spine demonstrates that even though technological innovations inevitably change the kind of experience spectators can have through time, the deep-seated desire for immersive, illusionistic environments has a long history. It also reminds us that the search for new kinds of visual spectacle never fades, as Griffiths recounts her visit to the recent *Bodies* exhibition which, unfortunately, did *not* send a 'magical frisson' (p. 284) down her spine. Nevertheless, we believe the link she sketches between these contemporary exhibits of plastinated bodies and the history of the various visual spectacles presented in the book provokes interesting thoughts about the limits (if any) of illusionistic representation and the possible nature of media (and of cinema) as a kind of taxidermy² that tries to halt the passing of time.

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Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009, 196 pp.

KATHARINA LINDNER

With *The Tactile Eye*, Barker provides a timely and much needed elaboration on contemporary debates around film and phenomenology. Notions of embodiment, the haptic and sensuousness have become increasingly central to film studies discourse in recent years, with scholars such as Laura U. Marks, Vivian Sobchack and others making some important inroads towards a critical understanding of the film experience that acknowledges both the 'body' of the viewer and the 'body' of the film. This shift constitutes a move away from traditional, psychoanalytically based approaches centring on conceptualizations of subjectivity that are based almost exclusively on the significance of vision. As part of this shift, *The Tactile Eye* accounts for the ways in which subjectivity is embodied and lived.

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Barker's aim is to show how films can 'make sense', and how they can 'move us' intellectually, emotionally, physically and sensually. Barker's book is a particularly significant addition to debates around film and embodiment, since it not only elaborates on the theoretical underpinnings of a phenomenological understanding of cinema but also begins to outline a conceptual and methodological framework for film analysis. It seems to me that the book's main contribution lies in the provision of a more generally applicable analytical approach for an exploration of the tactile, fleshy, muscular, visceral contact between image, imaged and viewer. It provides the reader with the analytical tools to carry out a tactile/textural film analysis by conceptualizing the reciprocal and reversible relationship between the body of the viewer and the body of the film. Importantly, Barker does not posit a consideration of the embodied and sensuous encounter between film and viewer in opposition to more traditional theoretical and analytical approaches (that might focus on formal, narrative, psychic or cognitive features). Instead, the embodied and tactile aspects of this encounter are conceptualized as an essential means of 'grasping' the emotional, intellectual and thematic aspects of any given cinematic experience.

Drawing on existential phenomenology (particularly Merleau-Ponty's work), and with reference to films from a variety of different genres, time periods, production contexts and national cinemas, Barker provides a provocative, accessible and engaging account of cinema's tactile dimensions. Throughout the book, she identifies three different styles or modes of tactility that characterize both the viewer's and the film's perceptive and expressive ways of 'being in the world': tactile, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive modes of touch. The three main chapters of the book are grouped around the bodily locales in which those modes of haptic behaviour/contact occur: the skin, the musculature and the viscera. Barker reminds the reader, however, that the film cannot be 'equated with or reduced to its physical body, any more than the viewer can' (p. 10), and that the bodily terms employed 'are not used here metaphorically, but are stretched beyond their literal, biological meaning to encompass their more phenomenological significance' (pp. 20–21).

In Chapter 1 ('Skin') Barker builds upon Marks's notion of 'haptic visibility' and discusses the significance of surface and texture in the relationship between viewer and film. She highlights the reciprocal quality of this contact by emphasizing the difference between images that invite a caressing, lingering look that 'touches' the surface of the film and a penetrating gaze that delves into the depth of the illusionistic three-dimensional space constructed on screen. While a penetrating gaze is about mastery, ownership and complete knowledge, tactile viewer engagement is associated with closeness, proximity and eroticism – it is 'truly intersubjective' (p. 35). Thinking about the skin as one of the 'locations' of the cinematic encounter is, however, only one step towards considering the cinematic experience in fully embodied terms. The

movies 'touch' us not only through appealing to our sense of touch, but they also get 'under our skin' and 'move' us in particular ways.

In Chapter 2 ('Musculature') Barker's discussion moves beneath the surface of the skin to consider how the cinematic encounter is experienced through particular modes of movement, comportment and gesture. Here, Barker describes films and scenes that move us physically; that push and pull us, that make us grip, hold, clench and lean forward in our seats. This mode of seeing is characterized by a grasping gaze that engages our muscles and tendons rather than a touching, caressing gaze that we can sense on the surface of the skin. Barker illustrates the muscular relationship between viewer and film through the description of two particular reciprocal muscular encounters that occur both within films as well as between films and viewers: the handshake and the chase. She argues that viewers can empathize with films kinaesthetically due to the similarities in the ways in which both films and viewers express their relations to the world through particular modes of comportment and movement, of taking up, moving through and extending space. Drawing parallels, in phenomenological terms, between certain human modes of comportment (leaning, reaching, swaying, flinching) and cinematic modes of comportment effected by dollies, zoom lenses, aspect ratios, editing patterns, and so on, Barker provides a conceptual frame that accounts for the muscular empathy between viewer and film. The ability to empathize arises from bodily experience and kinaesthetic memory, from our expressive and perceptive relations to the world. It is important to re-emphasize here that such an understanding of the cinematic experience does not necessarily stand in opposition to, for example, psychoanalytically-based film theory. Rather, it allows for a more fully embodied understanding of our encounter with cinema and provides a space in which we might account for the ways in which mental/psychic structures are articulated and inflected by our bodily behaviour in particular ways.

In Chapter 3 ('Viscera'), Barker delves even further into the murky depths of the body and draws parallels between the cinematic and human viscera, the vital organs that sustain life and animate us without being consciously noticed. For instance, Barker highlights the correspondence between cinematic movement and human movement, both of which are made up of discontinuous parts, of fits and starts, that are hardly noticeable and that create the illusion of a smoothly and continuously moving whole. Here, Barker goes back to early cinema to suggest that the tension between perceived continuity and underlying discontinuity/intermittence in the cinematic context resonates deeply and sensually with our own bodily rhythms in ways that can be both pleasurable and discomforting.

Overall, *The Tactile Eye* provides a provocative step towards a more comprehensive phenomenological understanding of the cinematic experience. What is missing, perhaps, in Barker's account, is an acknowledgement of difference. The 'body' is utterly central to the

conceptualization of cinema viewing proposed in the book. However, when talking about the viewer's body, Barker – perhaps inevitably, given the methodological underpinnings of her work (a textural analysis of different film texts/bodies) – refers to the viewer's body in rather generalizing terms. Differences with regard to the ways in which gender, sexuality, race or class, for instance, are embodied, and the significance of these 'lived' differences in the encounter with cinema, are not really accounted for. This is not necessarily a criticism of Barker's work, but an acknowledgement of the possibilities and avenues for future research that the book opens up. By outlining the ways in which the viewer's and the film's body share certain material, spatial and temporal structures, the book lays essential conceptual groundwork for the further development of a film analysis that accounts for the specificities of the viewer's and the film's way of 'being in the world'.

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Notes to Contributors

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Authors are guided through the submission procedure with onscreen prompts and instructions; however, if you experience any difficulties or have any comments to make about using Scholar One Manuscripts, please contact our editorial office. Like any new system it may benefit from some finetuning, and if there is anything we can do to improve the transition we would like to know.

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Notes and references, which should be kept to a minimum, should be on an automatic numbering system. Style for citations of written sources is as follows:

1. Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton et al. (London: Macmillan, 1982).
2. Ginette Vincendeau, 'Melodramatic realism: on some French women's films in the 1930s', *Screen*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1989), pp. 51–65.
3. Monika Treut, 'Female misbehaviour', in Laura Pietrapaolo and Ada Testaferri (eds), *Feminisms in the Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 106–21.

References to *films* in both notes and main text should include full title, and in the case of non-English language films original release title should precede US and/or British release title, followed by director and release date in round brackets: *A bout de souffle/Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960)

Where such information is relevant to the argument, details of production company and/or country of origin may also be included: *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, Warner Bros, US, 1945)

References to *television programmes* should be dated from the year of first transmission, and, in the case of long-running serials, the duration of the run should be indicated. Details of production company, transmitting channel, country, etc should be supplied where relevant: *Coronation Street* (Granada, 1961–)

Where writers or producers are credited their role should be indicated:

Where the Difference Begins (w. David Mercer, BBC, 1961)

For further details, visit <<http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/screen/submitpapers/>>

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